



When Does an Educational Policy Produce Inequalities? A Study on the Implementation of Law 13.415/2017 in Municipalities of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Abstract: This article analyzes the limits and contradictions in the implementation of Federal Law No. 13,415/2017, which established the New High School (NEM), focusing on the segmentation of the stage and the mechanisms of production of educational inequalities in the state of Minas Gerais. The theoretical-methodological proposition, anchored in *policy enactment theory*, combined two phases: an exploratory phase, with the application of questionnaires to school administrators from the 32nd Regional Teaching Commissioner in Pouso Alegre (MG); and a second phase based on a case study, with documentary analysis and interviews. In this last stage, administrators from four schools from different networks offering secondary education (state public network, full-time secondary

education, federal network, and private network) were interviewed. The documented evidence enables an analytical comparison of how the same policy is produced in institutional and regulatory contexts with significant differentiation and segmentation of the stage. The way in which the NEM was produced in different schools contributed to reinforcing institutional and educational inequalities. The cases analyzed demonstrate that curricular flexibility in the different offerings at this stage intensified preexisting hierarchies, revealing the limits of curricular flexibility policies in deeply unequal and segmented contexts.

Keywords: educational policies; educational inequalities; Law 13.415/2017; educational segmentation; high school

Quando uma política educacional produz desigualdades? Um estudo sobre a implementação da Lei 13.415/2017 em municípios do estado de Minas Gerais

Brasil. Resumo: Este artigo analisa os limites e as contradições no processo de implementação da Lei Federal n.º 13.415/2017, que instituiu o Novo Ensino Médio (NEM), com foco na segmentação da etapa e nos mecanismos de produção de desigualdades educacionais no estado de Minas Gerais. A proposição teórico-metodológica, ancorada na *policy enactment theory*, combinou duas fases: uma exploratória, com aplicação de questionários aos gestores escolares da 32.ª Superintendência Regional de Ensino de Pouso Alegre (MG); e uma segunda etapa feita a partir de um estudo de casos, com análise documental e realização de entrevistas. Nessa última etapa, foram entrevistados gestores de quatro escolas de diferentes redes que ofertavam o Ensino Médio (Rede pública estadual regular, de Ensino Médio em Tempo Integral, Rede federal e Rede privada). As evidências documentadas permitem estabelecer uma comparação analítica sobre como uma mesma política é produzida em contextos institucionais e regulatórios com significativa diferenciação e segmentação da etapa. A forma como o NEM foi produzido nas diferentes escolas contribuiu para reforçar desigualdades institucionais e formativas. Os casos analisados demonstram que a flexibilização curricular nas diferentes ofertas da etapa intensificou hierarquias preexistentes, revelando os limites de políticas de flexibilização curriculares em contextos profundamente desiguais e segmentados.

Palavras-chave: políticas educacionais; desigualdades educacionais; Lei 13.415/2017; segmentação educacional; ensino médio

¿Cuándo una política educativa genera desigualdades? Un estudio sobre la implementación de la Ley 13.415/2017 en municipios del estado de Minas Gerais, Brasil

Resumen: Este artículo analiza los límites y las contradicciones en el proceso de implementación de la Ley Federal n.º 13.415/2017, que instituyó la Nueva Enseñanza Secundaria (NEM), centrándose en la segmentación de la etapa y en los mecanismos de producción de desigualdades educativas en el estado de Minas Gerais. La propuesta teórico-metodológica, basada en la teoría de la promulgación de políticas, combinó dos fases: una exploratoria, con la aplicación de cuestionarios a los gestores escolares de la 32.ª Superintendencia Regional de Educación de Pouso Alegre (MG); y una segunda etapa basada en un estudio de casos, con análisis documental y realización de entrevistas. En esta última etapa, se entrevistó a directores de cuatro escuelas de diferentes redes que ofrecían enseñanza secundaria (red pública estatal regular, enseñanza secundaria a tiempo completo, red federal y red privada). Las pruebas documentadas permiten establecer una comparación analítica sobre cómo se produce una misma política en contextos institucionales y normativos con una diferenciación y segmentación significativas de la etapa. La forma en que se produjo el NEM en las diferentes escuelas contribuyó a reforzar las desigualdades institucionales y formativas. Los casos analizados demuestran que la flexibilización curricular en las diferentes ofertas de la etapa intensificó las

jerarquías preexistentes, revelando los límites de las políticas de flexibilización curricular en contextos profundamente desiguales y segmentados.

Palabras clave: políticas educativas; desigualdades educativas; Ley 13.415/2017; segmentación educativa; escuela secundaria

The Implementation of the New High School Policy in Brazil¹

Brazil's High School has been the target of recurrent reforms in recent decades, notably with Law No. 13.415/2017, known as the High School Reform (REM) or New High School (NEM). This public policy significantly changed the curricular structure of the stage, introducing the so-called academic pathways and providing more flexibility to the organization of curricular components. Its implementation was marked by controversies, especially as to its ability to mitigate or to intensify existing educational inequalities between public and private schools (Ferreti & Silva, 2017; Frigotto & Ramos, 2021; Silva, 2022).

As a result of the new curricular and organizational format introduced by the NEM, the workload has increased and the curricular design has been “flexibilized.” The curriculum now consists of the mandatory Basic General Education and of a diversified part, with in-depth and technical-vocational academic pathways. The Academic Pathways were designed to enable students to choose a part of their school journey according to their interests, aptitudes, and life and career projects, while Basic General Education is associated with knowledge in the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC)².

In addition, the Law that gave rise to the NEM also enabled, in the case of technical-vocational Pathways, the offering of distance learning and, in partnership with the private sector, began to foster expanded provision of full-time education. Therefore, this policy impacted the main objectives of school education and the educational opportunities for youth in Brazil (Cássio & Goulart, 2022; Jacomini, 2022).

A wide range of studies have been produced and documented on the NEM in Brazil (ANPEd, 2023; Silva et al., 2025). Based on the results of a systematic literature review conducted on the issue from 2017 to 2023, Mônica Ribeiro da Silva, Álvaro Chrispino, and Thiago Melo (2025) noted that the most explored issues, considering all the analyzed articles, were the process of regulation and/or implementation of the NEM in the states, the means of organization and relation with the Brazilian High School Common Curricular Base (BNCC-EM), the policymakers, and the presence of the private and business sector in the educational policy. Also, other studies indicate problems related to the policy implementation, the concept of education implicit in the new legislation, and the inequalities it has generated, among other issues (ANPEd, 2023; REPU, 2022; Silva et al., 2023).

In this study, we seek to consider the focus on the relation between the segmentation of the NEM, by the different offerings of the stage in the regular state public networks, full-time networks, federal networks, and private networks, and the possible educational inequalities that such segmentation may intensify or resolve. As we have shown in other publications (Silva, 2019; Silva & Carvalho, 2024), the relation between educational segmentation and inequalities can occur, among other ways, due to institutional, regulatory, and/or curricular differentiations within the same stage

¹ This work was originally written in Portuguese and subsequently translated into English by the *Espaço da Escrita* team, linked to the Research Pro-Rectorate of Unicamp.

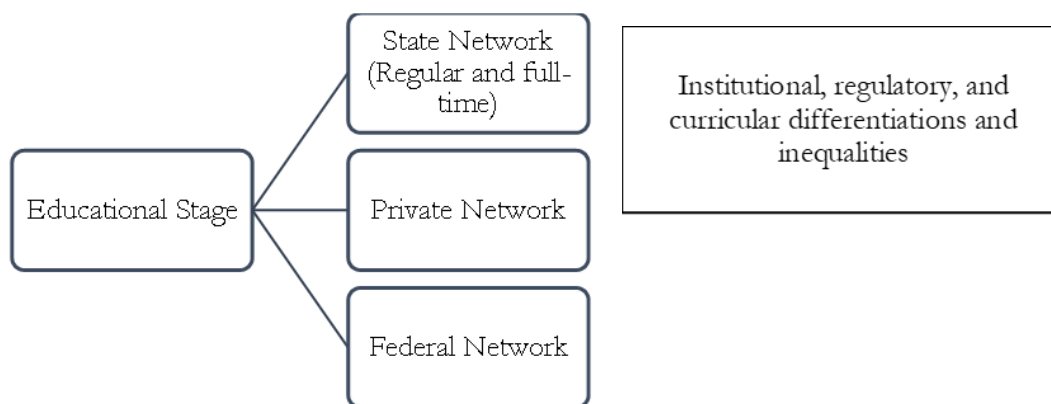
² Access to the Law is available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/ato2015-2018/2017/lei/113415.htm

or level of education. In this case, the literature classifies the segmentation as *horizontal*, as the differentiations involving the school offering of the same educational stage, such as human and pedagogical resources that schools can employ, foment educational inequalities (Muller et al., 1989; Viñao & Frago, 2002).

Chart 1 was designed to represent a hypothetical scheme of presentations of *horizontal segmentation* in educational systems, which we intend to analyze in this research.

Figure 1

Diagram representing the horizontal segmentation in the education systems



Note: Adapted from Silva & Carvalho (2024, p. 7)

The relation between horizontal segmentation and educational inequalities can be more or less intense depending on the context. It is more intense when the composition of the school enrollees is marked by family-driven social inequalities, since educational systems with greater differentiation in offerings tend to reproduce hierarchies and inequalities in educational outreach between different social classes and/or ethnic and cultural groups (Dubet et al., 2012; Silva, 2019, 2022).³

In the case of the NEM, horizontal segmentation tends to grow due to Brazil's regional disparities and due to inequalities within the educational system and between schools. For example, a survey conducted by the research group Public School and University Network (Rede Escola Pública e Universidade; REPU, 2022) found that more than 50% of Brazilian municipalities have only one high school. This finding precludes the promised possibility of choice of academic pathways by young people who depend on public schools, which represents 85% of enrollments in the high school.

The state of Minas Gerais (MG) is one of 27 federative units in Brazil. It has 853 municipalities and the second largest state public education network in the country, with

³ On the other hand, educational segmentation can also materialize via the existence of selective barriers institutionalized within the educational system itself—for example, exams that grant access to Higher Education in Brazil, such as the National High School Exam (ENEM)—that select which students are qualified to access the more valued and prestigious levels or stages of education. In this case, the segmentation is *vertical* and has the explicit function of social selection. In the case of vertical segmentation, these selective barriers between stages of the educational system explicitly act as barriers to the democratization of equal school opportunities between different social groups (Brito, 2017).

approximately 11,937 schools (municipal and state). A total of 3,565 schools compose the state network, which serves 761,618 students in the high school⁴ and have more than 60,000 teachers. The public high school system in MG is responsible for 84.3% of enrollment offerings in the state. The implementation of the New High School (NEM) in the state began in 2022, regulated by the State Department of Education of Minas Gerais Resolution No. 4,692/2021. In 2024, the state completed the first cycle of implementation of Law 13.415/2017. In this context, it is essential to investigate and show how the differences within Minas Gerais impact the production and recontextualization of the policy in the daily routine of schools.

Based on a field study conducted with high school administrators from Minas Gerais in some cities located in the southern part of the state, this article seeks to understand the limits and contradictions of the NEM policy, focusing on analyzing the segmentation of offerings of this educational stage. The results are part of a research project developed during a postdoctoral internship at the Faculty of Education of Unicamp between October 2023 and March 2025, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Nora Krawczyk, co-author of the article.

The Theory of Policy Enactment and the New High School in Schools

The NEM policy has been analyzed from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives since the proposal of Provisional Decree No. 746 of 2016, which gave rise to Law 13.415/2017 (ANPEd, 2023; Silva et al., 2025). There is vigorous consensus that business sectors had a hegemonic influence, from the proposal of the Provisional Decree to the approval of the Bill and its implementation (Silva, 2019). In Brazil, the presence of business owners in educational policies has been growing since the 1990s (Jacomini & Souza, 2021). It is argued that the development and implementation of educational policies need to be situated with the analysis of global capital articulation networks, perceived through the actions of companies and their influence on the so-called governance of education (Fritsch et al., 2023; Robertson & Verger, 2012; Shiroma & Evangelista, 2014) and on the “consensus of philanthropy,” internalized in some social policies, especially in education (Tarlau & Moeller, 2020)⁵.

The instruments of business groups for insertion into the dynamics of educational policies involve the provision of certain pedagogical resources, the production of knowledge that confirms their assumptions, and the power of mobilization through the media and formal and informal networks in the construction of narratives that seek to make the most important political debates in the field of education exclusively “technical” and rational. According to Shiroma and Evangelista (2014), on a global level, these articulations contributed toward a supposed “harmonization of the interests of governments and national and international capital, with a view to establishing new ways of managing the social” (p. 21).

In light of this conjuncture, Bowe et al. attempted to analyze educational policies in their book *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*, published in 1992. The authors had already rejected models of analysis of educational policy that separate the formulation and implementation phases. According to them, this methodology disregarded the political disputes and clashes between the different social groups and reinforced a supposed rationality of the public policy management process. The authors formulated this approach between the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the implementation of the *Education Reform Act* in the United Kingdom. The dominant paradigm in the field of studies was the proposal to analyze educational policies from three perspectives: 1) *the*

⁴ In addition to 1,084,914 elementary and middle school students.

⁵ One of the main means of expression of this influence consists in the attempt to achieve consensus among multiple social and institutional actors in support of the public policies.

proposed policy – which concerns official disputes related to intentions of change in a given *status quo* of society; 2) *the de facto policy* – which involves the political and legislative texts that inform the proposed policy and are the cornerstone for putting policies into practice; 3) and *the policy in use* – which encompasses the institutional discourses and practices that emerge from the process of policy implementation by professionals working at the practice level.⁶

This theoretical-methodological formulation would later consolidate as the policy cycle approach, having great insertion in Brazilian academic production since the 2000s (Mainardes, 2018). A few years after the policy cycle approach was proposed, Stephen Ball published the work *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-Structural Approach* (1994), in which he updates his theory and proposes understanding the policy cycle based on new dimensions. Thus, it should embrace—in addition to the role of the State—the protagonism of different social groups and actors that influence educational policies. For them, it is impossible to separately understand the different phases of formulation, implementation, and evaluation of a public policy⁷.

More recently, in the book titled *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*, the result of a study conducted in four English schools, Ball et al. (2021) identify about 170 ongoing policies in the schools researched, in a tangle of some that emerge and disappear and others that cater to specific groups with greater or lesser relevance.⁸ In this work, the authors construct the so-called *theory of policy enactment*. According to them, educational public policies are not merely implemented, but are subject to recontextualization and recreation processes, as per the “enactment” of the subjects who experience the spaces where they reach (Ball et al., 2021).

The theory of enactment seems to have relevant potential in the analysis of public policies in education, as it enables shifting the “State-centric” axis of analysis, which tends to separate the analysis of policy production and implementation spheres, prioritizing the school as a space where State policies can be “produced.” The authors suggest that schools and their professionals should be understood as spaces for negotiation and articulation, which can reestablish policies based on resistance, negotiation, and meanings given to their regulation process. Accordingly, our proposal here is to analyze the implementation of Law 13.415/2017 in Minas Gerais, predominantly based on the theory of enactment and the perception of professionals working in different schools in the production of the policy.

Methodology

This study was conducted in two complementary stages, with mixed approaches (quantitative and qualitative methods) and an interpretive character.⁹ The southern state of Minas Gerais, where the investigation was carried out, is recognized, among other things, for having a Human Development Index (HDI) above the national average and for being marked by recent urban and industrial growth, which has boosted the economic development of some municipalities in recent years (especially Pouso Alegre and Extrema). Therefore, it has more favorable social and economic

⁶ This theoretical-methodological construct was influenced, among other authors, by Michel Foucault and his proposition on “Regimes of Truth.” This idea was outlined to establish a connection between the role of the State and micropolitical processes in the analysis of educational public policies (Mainardes, 2018).

⁷ However, these different contexts proposed by Ball et al., although interrelated, have no temporal, linear, or sequential dimension. Each of them presents its own arenas, places, interest groups, disputes, and clashes.

⁸ The book *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools* was first published in the UK in 2012.

⁹ The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Universidade do Vale do Sapucaí), under opinion number N° 5.683.007.

situation that contrasts with several regions in Brazil, especially the poorest and most marginalized ones, located in large urban centers or in resource-poor regions.¹⁰

Below are the municipalities with the state schools offering high school education under the political and administrative jurisdiction of the 32nd Regional Teaching Commissioner of Pouso Alegre, MG, where the study was carried out: Itapeva; Cachoeira de Minas; Jacutinga; Camanducaia; Monte Sião; Cambuí; Munhoz.; Careaçú; Ouro Fino; Congonhal; Pouso Alegre; Córrego do Bom Jesus; Santa Rita do Sapucaí; Espírito Santo do Dourado; Ipuina; Estiva; São João da Mata; Extrema; São Sebastião da Bela Vista; Heliódora; Senador Amaral; Inconfidentes; Albertina; Senador José Bento; Bom Repouso; Silvianópolis; Borda da Mata; Tocos do Moji; Bueno Brandão; and Toledo.

1st Phase – Exploratory Stage

In the exploratory phase, when the field research was initiated there were 68 schools offering secondary education in the entire area under study. In this stage, we opted to apply a semi-structured questionnaire to all state school administrators from this area. All schools had begun the process of implementing the High School Reform in 2022. The questions in the aforementioned questionnaire focused on aspects of the main changes instituted with the new format of the educational stage, such as curricular organization, increased workload, availability of human, physical, and pedagogical resources necessary to guarantee the changes provided for in the policy implementation process. Also, other particular issues found in other educational networks by research on the issue were addressed (ANPED, 2023; Cássio & Goulart, 2022; Silva et al. 2025).

The questionnaire model, pre-tested with about 10 random volunteers, all associated with school management, had 14 objective questions and three open-ended questions (in which respondents could elaborate more freely on the inquiries).¹¹ In some of these questions, we used Likert-like scales (Dalmoro & Vieira, 2013).¹² The research instrument was sent to all 68 school administrators associated with the 32nd Regional Teaching Commissioner of Pouso Alegre via email and WhatsApp, from October 2022 to March 2023. Only 17 professionals, working in schools from 13 different cities in southern Minas Gerais, actively participated in the study. Despite a relatively low participation in relation to the total number, we value the diversity of municipalities represented in the responses. The exploratory phase data were anonymized and processed using descriptive statistics, with the *Microsoft Excel*.

2nd Phase – Case Studies

After consolidation of the exploratory phase, aiming to deepen the analyses outlined in the research objectives, a four-case study was conducted by document analysis and interviews with school administrators. The case study technique can be applied to an individual, an organization, changes that occurred in a region, a program or political reform, etc. According to Amaro (2014),

¹⁰ This information is relevant, as a public policy is always situated within a specific context, which can favor or hinder the achievement of its formally constructed objectives (Pires et al., 2024).

¹¹ The questionnaire model was prepared through Google Forms. The following researchers collaborated with the development and/or pre-testing of the instrument: Nora Krawczyk, Atilio Catosso Salles, Camila Quina Pereira, Joelma Pereira Fonseca e Rosimeire Pereira Borges.

¹² The Likert scale is a method for measuring attitudes, opinions, or perceptions through questionnaires. The respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements (items) about an issue.

“in its origin, the case study, as a qualitative approach to the social sphere, arises from the desire to reconcile investigative and political interests” (p. 122).¹³

In this phase, the analysis is focused on the city of Pouso Alegre (MG), an important industrial hub in southern Minas Gerais, especially in the food, pharmaceutical, and heavy machinery sectors. The city has 11 schools under the State Department of Education and approximately 5,000 students enrolled in regular high school in the public network (in regular and full-time high schools), in addition to a federal school with 403 enrollments, and 10 private schools with approximately 1,229 enrollments in high school¹⁴.

For this stage, the analysis was predominantly based on the framework of the theory of enactment (Ball et al., 2021), which considers the active role of school subjects in the reinterpretation and re-signification of public policies. Four cases that represented the main types of high school offerings and modes in Brazil were selected, aiming at understanding how the policy was translated in the face of the institutional and regulatory differentiations and segmentations in these spaces. The selected schools were:

- **School A:** Regular State High School
- **School B:** Full-Time State High School
- **School C:** Federal network High School with integrated vocational education
- **School D:** Private school belonging to a nationwide educational group

In each school, an interview was conducted with a representative of the school management. The main concern during the interviews was to understand how they interpreted the documents that regulated the NEM and experienced their implementation, translating them into effective practices in the school routine. Therefore, before conducting the interviews, we analyzed the following New Secondary Education regulatory documents:

- Federal Law no. 13,415/2017
- Minas Gerais State Department of Education Resolution No. 4,692/2021
- Minas Gerais State Department of Education Guidelines
- Full-Time State High School and academic pathway specific guidelines

The main results are presented below. We chose to include in this article only the results that were most relevant to the objectives established above.

Results

Exploratory Phase

The exploratory research with administrators was fundamental to provide more objective insights into the material conditions and resources with which the New High School policy was produced in schools.

General Respondent Profile

- Age: Most administrators are aged 39 to 50 years (11 respondents).
- Race/skin-color: Predominance of self-declared whites (16 of respondents).

¹³ This research technique can also adopt diverse epistemological orientations, such as exploratory, interpretative, explanatory, action research approaches, etc. One of its defining aspects is the dedication to the knowledge and description of what is idiosyncratic, specific, and legitimate in itself as to the chosen cases (Amaro, 2014).

¹⁴ <https://qedu.org.br/municipio/3152501-pouso-alegre/censo-escolar>

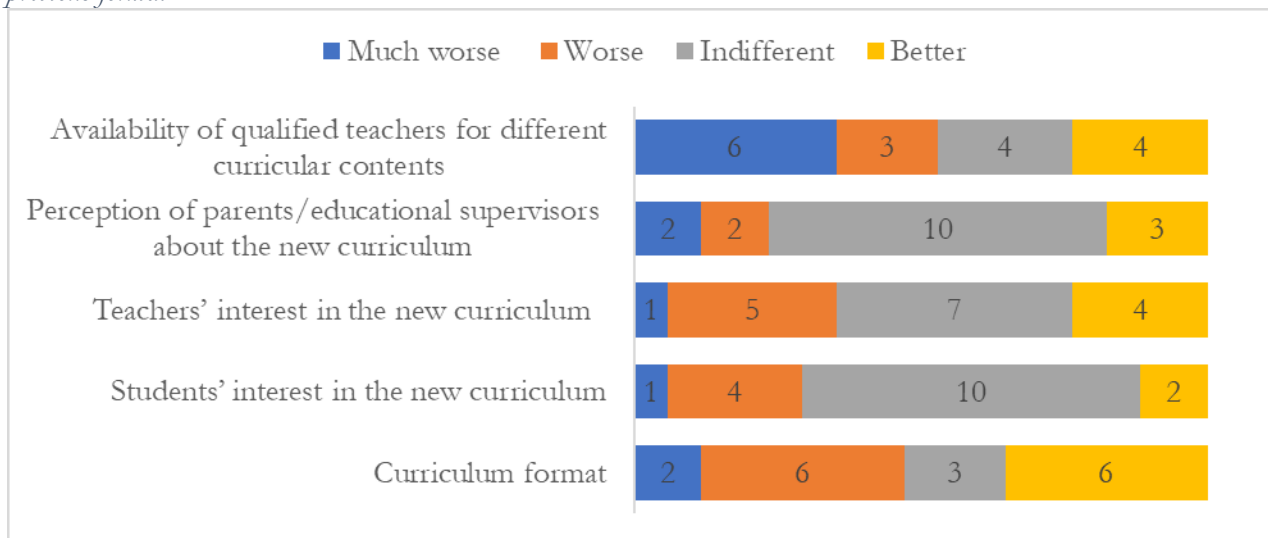
- Education: All have a bachelor’s degree with a teaching diploma, and 76% also have a graduate degree.
- Experience: 41% have worked between 2 and 4 years in the school management position.
- Method of access to the position: 77% reached the position through certification and democratic election.
- Regarding the education offered in the schools: of the 17 schools represented, 13 offered complete secondary education (middle and high school) and two of them offered Full-Time high school, and eight of them also offered Youth and Adult Education.

Perceptions on the New Secondary Education

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 show part of the administrators’ perceptions on the policy implementation in the schools.¹⁵ The results refer to the following questionnaire question: “Comparing the new high school format with the previous one, what is your perception on the following issues?”. The adopted Likert scales ranged from “Much worse,” “Worse,” “Indifferent,” to “Better” in the case of Graph 1; from “Much below expectations,” “Below expectations,” “Remains the same,” “Above expectations,” to “Much above expectations” in the case of Graph 2; or from “No difficulty,” “Little difficulty,” “Medium difficulty,” “Much difficulty,” to “Insurmountable difficulty” in the case of Graph 3. Graph 4 shows the result for the question to the administrators regarding public authority support in the implementation process of the New Secondary Education, as support for the training of faculty, in addition to dialogue with families and students. The answer options offered were: “More than enough support,” “Sufficient support,” “Little support,” “Insufficient support,” and “No support.”

Figure 1

Administrators’ perceptions on aspects involving the format and structure of the New High School compared to the previous format

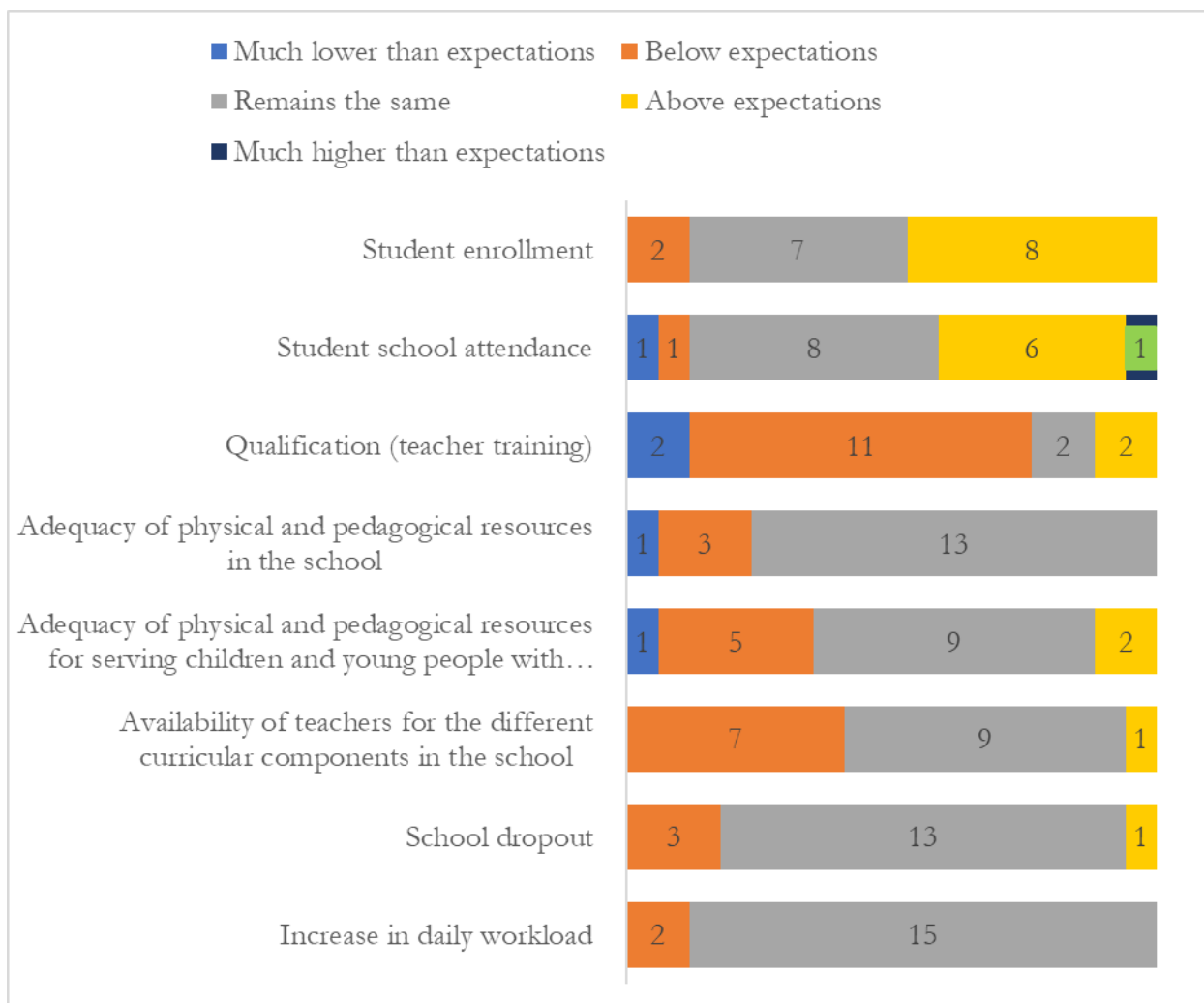


Source: authors (2025)

¹⁵ We kept the absolute number of answers for each question. Thus, the sum of horizontal columns of the charts is 17 (total number of respondents).

Figure 2

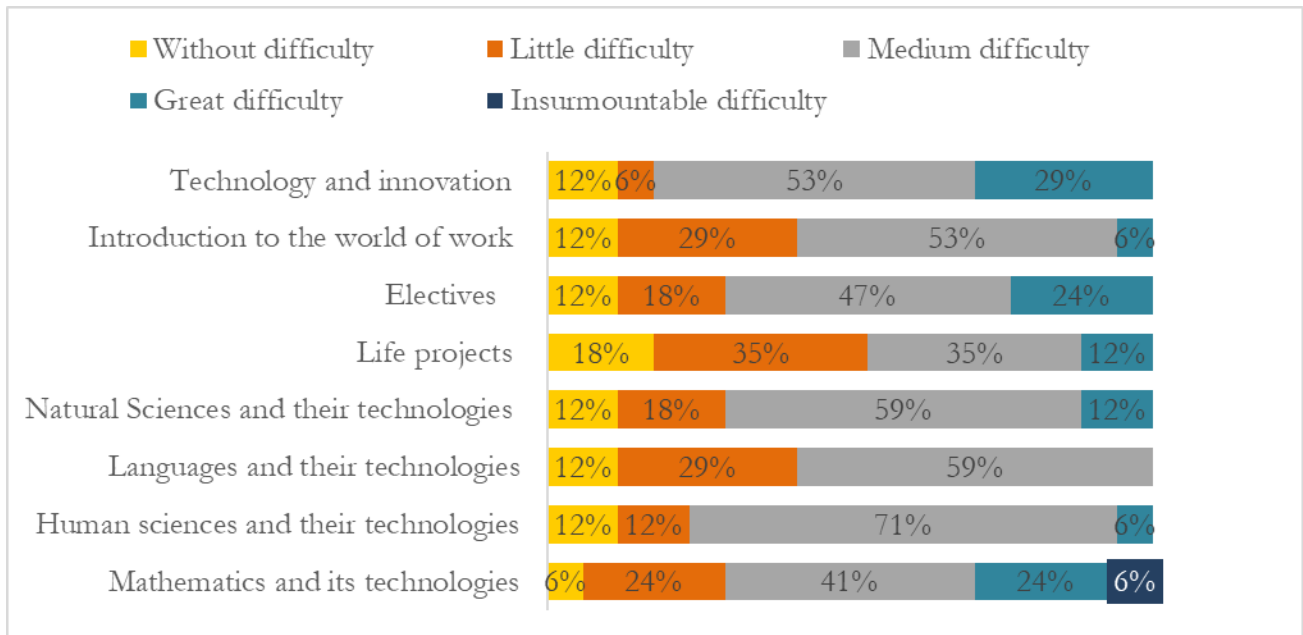
Administrators' perceptions on aspects involving the comparison between the New High School and the previous format of the stage in the same school



Source: authors (2025)

Figure 3

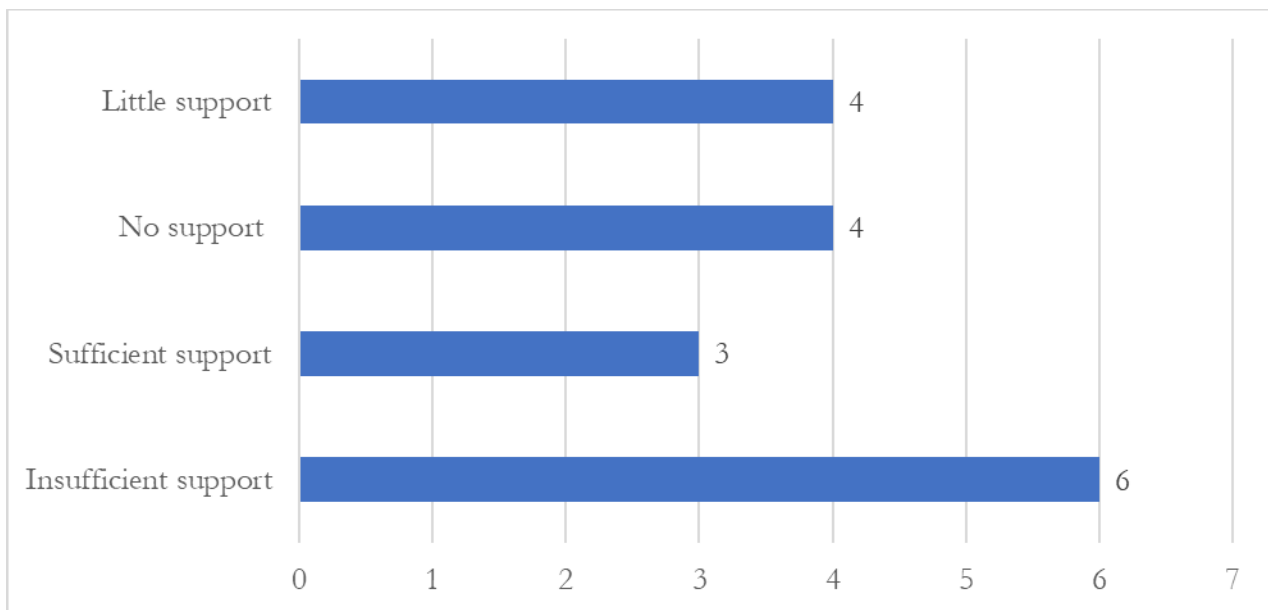
*Administrators' perceptions on the implementation of the New High School academic pathways, according to the State Department of Education of Minas Gerais guidelines*¹⁶



Source: authors (2025)

Figure 4

Perceptions on public authority support in continuing education and training for management teams



Source: authors (2025)

¹⁶ In this graph exclusively, we use the results as percentages.

The data show the administrators have predominantly critical perceptions on the NEM model and its implementation. Relevant trends can be noted for the analyses. According to them, the new high school curricular format became worse (35.3%) or much worse (11.8%) than the previous format. The availability of qualified teachers for the different curricular components was assessed as much worse (35.3%) or worse (17.6%) than before. Regarding the adequacy of physical and pedagogical resources, 52.9% of the administrators indicated that the situation remained unchanged, showing the lack of structural improvements in schools to implement the NEM policy. Teacher availability at the school was below expectations (64.7%) or far below expectations (11.8%) according to the participants' assessment. School dropout rates were reported as above expectations (35.3%) or much above expectations (5.9%). Despite that, it is noted that almost half of the respondents perceived the NEM's curricular format as "Better."

The major difficulties faced in implementing the Academic Pathways were observed in those related to the National Common Curricular Base, geared toward the students' scientific and cultural education (Mathematics, Human Sciences, Languages, and Natural Sciences); however, there is also a perception of difficulty related to "Technology and Innovation" and elective courses. Regarding public authority support, the perception of insufficiency predominated, notably the lack of support for the training of faculty, in addition to the lack of dialogue with families and students. Finally, even with these trends, in the administrators' evaluation, the changes instituted with the new high school format—explored in many aspects in the questionnaire—were marked as "Indifferent," "Remained the same," or the school had "Medium difficulty" adapting.

This evidence, built in the exploratory phase, was important for the study objectives. They may suggest that the legislation had a very deficient institutional capacity to produce changes in the schools, with little legitimacy and mobilization of school communities, since the participants held leadership positions in each school.

Case Studies

We present here the results of the case study, consisting of the analysis of documents and interviews with school administrators.

Document Analysis

Analysis of the documents indicated that the concept of education, present in Law 13.415/2017, reflects the National Common Curricular Base competency-based education, according to which the quality of school education can be managed through the curriculum and large-scale assessments (Silva, 2018). Law 13.415/2017 values curricular flexibility and adaptation to a supposedly more competitive and strict job market, with emphasis on the neoliberal figure of the "self-made man" (Pelissari, 2023; Safatle et al., 2021). This law presents schooling as the development of competencies aimed at youth leadership and the training of more productive human capital. According to Silva (2018), the central role of the notion of competencies revives discourses already present in the curricular policies of the 1990s, with pragmatic and a-historical limitations. Resolution No. 4.692/2021, which regulates the policy in Minas Gerais, incorporates elements from the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, but also youth flexibility and protagonism, as noted by Silva, Krawczyk & Calçada (2023) in other contexts. In turn, the pedagogical proposal of Full-Time High School is based on extending the school day and the integral development of students, but it lacked formal guarantees that schools were be prepared for it, regarding pedagogical and human resources.

We note the institutionalization of a fragmentation of school education, guided by a value-based connection between employability and entrepreneurship. According to Lucas Barbosa

Pelissari (2023), there was an attempt to build a “frail conceptual hybridity” as to the integration between general education and vocational training. The term “integration” has a profound and specific meaning in the tradition of polytechnics. In this tradition, integration refers to a dialectical and organic unity between general education (science, culture) and vocational and technical education, oriented toward integral human development and overcoming educational duality. The documents of the so-called High School Counter-reform (such as the new National Curricular Guidelines for Vocational and Technological Education – DCNEPT) continue to use the word “integration.” However, they use it to describe a model that is actually the opposite: curricular fragmentation. In this new format, general education and vocational training are offered concurrently and, at times, even in different institutions, without the dialectical unity of the curriculum (Pelissari, 2023).

We also observed the lack of a clear definition of education and purpose for Full-Time High School and Youth and Adults Education, as well as the lack of specific guidelines for school administrators. The guidelines for New High School and Full-Time High School omit information about the participation of external agents (companies, NGOs, public authorities) and criteria for defining academic pathways, changes in the Political-Pedagogical Project and School Regulations. These gaps suggest that the NEM regulation in Minas Gerais lacked essential structural guarantees and regulatory instruments.

Although the guidelines and regulations suggest interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary curricula, there has not been proper continuous teacher training to fulfill these suggestions. Such flaw led to resistance among faculty and the state of Minas Gerais sought to mitigate this problem with the figure of the New High School Supervisor, who was to coordinate the curricular integration between Basic General Education and Academic Pathways. Notably, this conception of curriculum resembles a managerialist view of education, in which the educational process is treated as something that can be managed through techniques and methods, without collective and critical building. Thus, several schools had to improvise the implementation according to their own resources, which, being unequal, intensified the educational inequalities and segmentation between institutions.

Interviews with School Administrators

The interviews were important for a more in-depth approach to aspects previously identified and showed other elements not captured by the questionnaires or document analysis. Below, we list the main results by school.

School A – Regular NEM in the Public Network.

First, it was a top-down reform. There was no popular participation.
(Principal of School A - PSA)

School A, since 2022, has adapted its curriculum to Law 13.415/2017 and the SEE-MG specific guidelines, as stated in Resolution 4.692/2021. Currently, it offers Middle School (6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades) and High School classes (1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades). The school’s student composition is proportional to that of the city: 78.7% self-declared as White; 2.27% self-declared as Black; 16.5% self-declared as Mixed-race; 0.25% self-declared as Yellow, and 0% self-declared as Indigenous (2.33% did not declare an answer). According to the principal, the school has an average of 40 students per high school class. In 2024, the school had a total of 1,292 students, of whom 773

were high school students, and, among these, 192 were enrolled in the Federal government's "*Pé de meia*" program.¹⁷

The School A principal was quite critical of the New High School, especially of the approval process without participation of the school community, the lack of resources, and insufficient State support. Despite having tenured teachers—an unusual situation in MG (Pereira, 2024)—, the main difficulty reported was the lack of teachers for the Academic Pathways.

Interviewer: What type of difficulty did you perceive that was most determinant in the school (for implementing the NEM)?

PSA : Lack of faculty. Specific information. Space in school communities, of the teams and school units. Laboratories, equipped classrooms. The human, pedagogical, and material resources and architecture of schools are not designed for the New High School.

They also noted a misalignment between the NEM policy pathways and the National High School Exam (ENEM), which reduces student adherence to the new curricular format.

PSA: What is written in the document, in the resolution, in the memo, how it should be executed, and reality, they are miles apart. Because students are not prepared for this New High School. And the selection process itself did not adopt the new high school. So, the selection process itself does not adopt the new Secondary Education reform in its curriculum. Public school students are disadvantaged in relation to private schools. We have a tenured math teacher (who works in the private network). And he presented that by the middle of the year they had worked on the entire curriculum for this new High School and from the middle of the year onwards, on the selection process. Selection process content. There, they have seven Portuguese language classes and here we have four. At night, we have three. No way!

According to him, with the REM, the new curricular organization reduced the students' connection with traditional subjects and increased the teaching staff's workload. Teachers started teaching content that is inconsistent with their initial training. In our assessment, in addition to the unavailability of human, physical, and pedagogical resources that can ensure the transition to the new High School model, we found that the School A principal's perception is that, as the curricular reforms are not aligned with the higher education evaluation and selection system (in the Brazilian case, ENEM), they end up making mobilization in schools less faithful to the standards and more associated with the pragmatic interests of the school community, especially the students' expectations. This aspect seems to align with the trend observed in other studies (ANPEd, 2023), which indicated that the new High School model would end up suppressing the demand for access to Higher Education in Brazil.

¹⁷ Financial-educational incentive program in the savings mode, geared toward promoting student retention and school completion for students with social and economic vulnerabilities enrolled in public high schools. The objective is to democratize access and reduce social inequality among young people, in addition to ensuring greater social inclusion through education, fostering social mobility.

School B – Full-Time High School in the Public School Network.

We've had a shift from a socioeconomic point of view, we've had a shift from the point of view of family commitment, and we've also had a shift from the point of view of student quality... today, fortunately, we have, so to speak, the cream of the crop of the city's highest-achieving students. (Principal of School B - PSB)

School B has only 170 high school students enrolled and 24 teachers. The institution has shown improvements in some educational indicators in recent years, such as the IDEB (Index of Basic Education Development) and age-grade distortion. Since 2021, however, it has undergone a social selection that has altered the profile of its students, raising questions about the impact of the full-time system on young people who balance studies and work. The principal defended the full-time model as based on the students' supposed "presence," "choice," and "life project." However, in his account, he also stated that dropout and requests for transfer to the regular system are issues that have affected School B since the implementation of the model, one of the main measures suggested by Resolution 4.692/2021 in the state of Minas Gerais.

The socioeconomic level of its students is considered medium-high, but the standardized information released by INEP on the indicator provides no data on potential differences between the public of this institution and that of School A, for example. In our assessment, we can assume there are significant differences regarding this aspect, as the full-time high school tends to exert strong social selection on the composition of the school population, as indicated by Gomes (2019).

The principal reported that the main difficulty faced in implementing REM at School B was the high percentage of contracted teachers, especially for the Academic Pathways, but also for some areas of Basic General Education. This is the "Achilles' heel" at school B, according to his statement.

PSB: And how does that influence things? A lot. On the sequence of work. If you have a different teacher every year, you can't establish the school's routine, you can't work towards the objective of the school. The result it has today, what does it want to achieve... it is precisely because of that, because you need to know the ground you're standing on. So, the longer you stay at your school, the more you understand what your school does and what it wants to achieve.

The principal also reported that there was major resistance and dispute among tenured teachers as to the distribution of classes at the beginning of the school years after the introduction of the New High School. That is because, according to him, a curricular flexibility was created that made the process of choosing study areas quite undefined, both for basic education subjects and for technical-vocational pathways.

In his assessment, the changes should have been conceived and implemented on the basis of a pilot experiment and gradually. Thus, adjustments could be tested according to the interests of the youth and the adaptations and suggestions made by faculty. In one of the interview excerpts, the School B principal reported his apprehension about the teachers' widespread resistance to the new High School curriculum, given its unpopularity. School B did not receive structural improvements, such as laboratories or classrooms adapted with the implementation of the NEM.

School C – NEM Integrated with Vocational Education in the Federal Network.

Here, there wasn't even an alteration, in fact. There was a discussion in 2019 regarding convergence and such, but we never fully converged. (Director of School C - DSC)

The federal network *campus*, which was part of this study, was implemented in 2010, as part of the Expansion Plan for Vocational and Technological Education in the municipality where the research was conducted, with the offering of the Subsequent Technical Course in Agriculture. The first courses offered there used the structures of a municipal school and were developed as an extension of a *campus* located in a neighboring city, also belonging to the federal network of vocational education.

According to the Institutional Development Plan of the federal network (MEC, 2024), in effect from 2019 to 2024, the *campus* has already graduated more than 2,000 students since its implementation and has been growing every year. Currently, according to the Director of Educational Development who answered the interview, the federal network unit has 12 high school classes, four classes for each year of the stage, which attend four different vocational courses integrated with high school. They are: Chemical Technician; Computer Technician; Administration Technician; and Building Technician.

In the assessment of the Director of Educational Development of the institution, the student body is composed of one part (50%) that comes from the public school system and has the same socioeconomic profile as the regular system, and the other half of students from families with a higher socioeconomic level who may at times be former students of the private school system. According to data from the socioeconomic questionnaire of the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB), the students' socioeconomic level was also classified as Medium–High. We did not find the racial profile of the students in the Institutional Development Plan.

The director of the Federal Institute showed the most resistance to the NEM, since, according to him, the offering of High School at the unit maintained a good part of its organizational and curricular structure, without fully adhering to the REM.

Interviewer: And regarding the changes the Law brought, was it a smooth process, from the perspective of planning and implementation, or did you face any difficulties?

PSC: No, it was totally difficult. The faculty is extremely resistant. There were even demonstrations at the time against the reduction of working hours. But we always had to be real: that it was a budgetary issue, the government pressuring. We were amidst the 2019 government, you know? Then it was the beginning of the Bolsonaro administration. So, it was a government opposed to the policy of the Federal Institutes. So, there was enormous pressure from above that helped us talk better among ourselves. Because the resistance could happen politically, but not administratively. We had to swallow what came our way, you know?

The main criticism perceived in his interview concerned the reduced general education workload, which caused internal tensions and distorted the teaching work. According to him, this change ended up leading to many clashes among the teachers, both due to the imminent possibility of an immediate salary reduction and the possibility of distortion between their initial training areas and the pedagogical work in the new curricular components, created by the articulation between the

National Common Curricular Base and the new academic pathways. Finally, in his personal assessment of the New High School:

PSC: It's garbage, it was a rushed, clumsy move, it was a practically almost illegitimate government at the time, which tried to push the thing, then ended up doing a reform of the reform, which I don't think will be ready either. Soon it will need another reform to make this thing work... I think the worst thing was the reduction of the basic workload, establishing the ceiling, it was terrible, it opened the door for a total precariousness of high school education, which is a very sensitive area, because it's where people are almost entering the job market, choosing their future, their profession....

The counterpoint adopted, according to the Director, was the maintenance of the Inducing Curricular Guidelines of the Federal Network proposed by the National Council of Institutions of the Federal Vocational, Scientific and Technological Education Network (Conif, 2018), which advocate for inseparability between general and vocational education. However, Pelissari (2023) observes that, even within the federal network, there was curricular fragmentation and teacher devaluation, reinforced by competency-based logic and subservience of the curriculum to the market.¹⁸

School D – NEM in the Private Network.

As it is a private network, we work with privileged students. Most families are structured, they have better purchasing power, so it's a profile that I can say, in the society we live in, is one of privilege. (Educational Supervisor of School D- ESSD)

School D is private and quite traditional in the city where the research was conducted. There are enrolled students from families with recognized social and economic advantages. The educational supervisor of the school (ESS) answered the interview. The institution is integrated with an educational company with nationwide reach, which provides resources such as textbooks, teacher support, and teacher training through a digital platform, enabling pedagogical interaction and support with students, in addition to a series of educational support resources. According to the official website of School D's partner company, one of the largest and best-known in Brazil, the institution serves over five million students, teachers, and school administrators throughout Brazil, partnering with various textbook publishers and providing a wide range of educational services, such as teaching systems, pedagogical solutions through digital learning platforms, and e-commerce. The idea is that they "are integral partners of the school."

Regarding the school's infrastructure, its website informs that the unit has air-conditioned classrooms; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, and Computer labs; a library; a multi-sport court, a soccer field, and a running track. Moreover, it also provides vocational and study guidance services to high school students; individualized text rewriting; psychological support; pedagogical workshops and doubt-solving sessions.

¹⁸ CONIF is composed of 41 institutions – 38 Federal Institutes, 2 Federal Centers for Technological Education (CEFETS), and Colégio Pedro II – represented by the principals of each.

This is a forum for discussion, proposal, and promotion of policies for the development of vocational and technological education, research, and innovation. The Council works in the debate and advocacy of public, free, and excellent education.

At late 2024, School D had seven high school classes: three in the first grade, three in the second grade, and one in the third grade. Differently from public schools, we did not find some important information about School D, such as the IDEB, or the number of enrollments and teachers at each stage. During the interview, as the educational supervisor had said she did not have this information, we later contacted her to request it, but we received no response.

School D's educational supervisor, who responded to the interview, stated that the unit fully adapted to the NEM back in 2022. Such achievement received support of the maintaining institution, which provided guidance on curricular changes and conducted training for the teachers and pedagogical team. The school had adequate human, physical, and pedagogical resources, according to the same professional. In their assessment, no major issues was perceived regarding the availability of human, physical, and pedagogical resources for the institution to adapt to the new High School model.

ESSD: “we adapted everything that was instructed. I usually say that if you consider, in our city, our school is the one that is most adequate, because we have a very good physical structure. So, it was, let's say, not calm, but it greatly facilitated this adaptation.

The maintaining institution provided support, according to the ESSD, through practical guidance on required measures for compliance with the changes provided for in the legislation, especially regarding how the curricular changes should be implemented. This was put in effect, for example, through changes to textbooks, training live streams with teachers, information in weekly bulletins, and even the indication for hiring teachers for the new pathways. However, the same supervisor reported resistance from some more experienced teachers, which led to a partial renewal of the teaching staff.

In order to adapt to the new curriculum of the NEM, School D administered questionnaires to students to define the academic pathways. The supervisor noted that the students showed a preference for the previous model, due to its greater alignment with the ENEM. She also reported that the pathways were seen by the students as not very demanding. The experiment showed the autonomy of the private network, supported by institutions and its own resources.

In summary, the School A administrator criticized the imposition and the lack of resources for the production of the policy in daily routine. The School B administrator valued the full-time model, but indicated structural and curricular problems and significant dropout rates. The administrator responsible for School C resisted adherence, maintaining some of their own guidelines. In turn, the educational supervisor of School D adapted with private support, but reported low student adherence to the pathways. The public schools lacked state resources that could provide greater engagement and legitimacy for the policy. On the other hand, the private and federal networks acted with greater autonomy, either through their own resources or through political articulation. These differences show the structural segmentation and the unequal effects of the NEM's implementation in Minas Gerais.

Final Considerations

The main issue addressed by the research, which gave rise to this article, was understanding how an educational policy is implemented, in practice, in segmented and unequal institutional contexts such as the offering of secondary education in Brazil. An empirical analysis, conducted in schools of the 32nd Regional Teaching Commissioner of Pouso Alegre (MG), found a significant

asymmetry in how the policy was received, interpreted, and operationalized by schools. The scarcity of human and material resources, especially in the state public network, associated with the lack of participatory planning and technical support, compromised the implementation of the policy. In contrast, the private school had greater adaptability and autonomy, while the federal network school showed more resistance and criticism towards the model.

The top-down normative imposition logic and insufficient public authority support weakened the process of engaging the professionals with the policy. School A criticized the imposing manner and the lack of resources. School B valued the full-time model; however, its administrator pointed structural and curricular problems and significant dropout rates. School C resisted adherence, maintaining some of its own guidelines. School D adapted with the help of private support; however, it reported low student adherence to the pathways. The public schools lacked state resources that could provide greater engagement and legitimacy for the policy. On the other hand, the private and federal networks acted with greater autonomy, either through their own resources or through political articulation. These differences show one of the dimensions related to the structural segmentation and unequal effects of the NEM's implementation in Minas Gerais.

The theory of enactment (Ball et al., 2021) has proven useful for understanding the recontextualization of the policy in schools. The production of the NEM in each school was marked by practices of resistance, adaptation, and even denial, depending on the institutional context. However, in our assessment, all the NEM-related problems and limitations documented here concern not only the policy implementation process, but rather the very conception of youth education upheld by its devisers, that is, the corporate reformers in Brazilian education.¹⁹

The main contribution of this study was understanding, based on the perceptions of the main leaders in the school units, how the NEM policy was implemented in a specific context in MG. At the same time, the documented evidence provides an analytical comparison of how the same policy is produced in institutional and regulatory contexts with significant differentiation and segmentation of the stage. The regulation of educational policies and the attempt to institutionalize an “ideal type” of school, curriculum, and school education in Brazil are strongly conditioned by a set of aspects that are exogenous to schools, but decisive within them, and can intensify or resolve educational inequalities stemming from segmentation. Most of these aspects are not considered in the implementation of the New High School policy in the schools studied in MG or articulated with it.

New studies, especially with larger samples, are needed for more in-depth assessment of the extent to which these schools represent the situation of the state and even the country. However, considering the area where the research was conducted, we can conclude that the implementation of Law 13.415/2017 in MG ended up reinforcing the horizontal segmentation and intensifying the symbolic and material competition between the schools. The data allow us to state

¹⁹ The so-called “corporate reformers of education” refer to a group of private-sector actors, institutions, and organizations that, primarily from the 1990s onwards, began to exert increasing influence on the formulation of educational policies in Brazil. Groups such as the Ayrton Senna Institute, Unibanco Institute, Lemann Foundation, and Todos Pela Educação Movement, among others, have coordinatedly acted in advocacy of a corporate management model for public education, with an emphasis on accountability, large-scale assessment, curriculum flexibility, and closer ties between schools and the job market. In the specific case of the New High School, their initiative was decisive for the proposal of Provisional Decree No. 746/2016—converted into Law no. 13.415/2017—, through advocacy, production of technical documents, research funding, and direct influence in government spheres. Critics note that this agenda incorporates an instrumental view of education, subordinating it to the logic of training for the market and weakening the integral and emancipatory educational character of public schools.

that an educational policy, to be both effective and socially fair, must address the diversity of educational networks, engage education professionals in the formulation process, and guarantee the necessary means for its implementation. Without that, the promise of a more attractive, flexible High School connected to the future of youth, as promised by reformers associated with corporate foundations, risks becoming yet another public policy marked by exclusion and precariousness in schools.²⁰

Therefore, *When does an educational policy produce inequalities?* as questioned in the title of this article? When, rather than promoting measures that favor equality of conditions and opportunities amid any inequalities, as required by the Federal Constitution of Brazil (1988) and the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (1996), it reinforces pre-existing hierarchies between networks, schools, and students, on both material and symbolic levels. Based on the above research, this occurs especially under the following conditions:

1. When implementation is unequal between educational networks. The research showed that schools from distinct networks—regular state, full-time state, federal, and private networks—had to implement the same policy, but under unequal structural, financial and autonomy conditions. While private and federal schools managed to adapt their curricula with more flexibility and resources, state schools dealt with teacher shortages, precarious infrastructure, and a lack of technical support. The same policy, applied uniformly in unequal contexts, tends to produce unequal effects.

2. When the implementation logic is top-down and disregards the school context. The research found a vertical imposition of the NEM guidelines, without effective support, listening, and participation of administrators, teachers, or school communities. This bureaucratic and prescriptive logic hinders the critical appropriation of the policy and compromises the building of contextualized pedagogical solutions. Policies formulated “for” schools, rather than “with” schools, rarely translate into real pedagogical transformation.

3. When curriculum flexibility favors those who already have more resources. The proposal for academic pathways and technical-vocational education, although justified as flexible and modern, favored schools with better infrastructure and diversification capacity, intensifying horizontal segmentation. Schools with limited educational offerings end up directing their students to more limited pathways, leading to unequal education within the same educational stage. Thus,

²⁰ In July 2024, after many clashes in the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate, Law No. 14,945 was approved by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and amended important aspects of Law 13,415. Among the main points, the new legislation increased the total workload of the Basic General Education from 1800 to 2400 hours and reduced that of the Academic Pathways to 600 hours, seeking to reinforce the common and mandatory nature of the students’ scientific and cultural education, even though curriculum flexibility has remained. It also re-established the mandatory nature of all fields of knowledge—Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Human Sciences—throughout the three years and determined that states should guarantee the offering of nighttime high school whenever there is demand. Although, in our assessment, this curricular recomposition has been important, it should be noted that Law 14,945/2024 maintained the possibility of work and volunteer experiences being used to fulfill curricular requirements of the school, which can weaken and hasten the school’s role at this stage. The new legislation also maintained the incentive for expansion of the Full-Time Secondary Education model, as well as the allocation of public resources from the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and for the Valorization of Education Professionals (FUNDEB) for the technical and vocational education offered by the private sector (Brazil, 2024), which tends to intensify the operation of private actors in this educational stage. The changes entered into force in 2025 and will require further investigation to evaluate their implementation.

flexibility turns into fragmentation, and what should be a choice becomes curricular limitation and reductionism.

4. When there is a lack of adequate funding and planning. According to the interviewed administrators, the NEM was implemented without a proportional reinforcement of human, pedagogical, or financial resources for schools to “produce” the policy in their daily routine. This resulted in overloaded professionals, curricular improvisations, and school dropout. The policy, in this case, led to more precariousness than innovation. Without real conditions for implementation, ambitious policies become promoters of frustration and inequality.

5. When there are no mechanisms for correction of structural asymmetries. The NEM policy provided for no effective mechanisms to compensate for inequalities between networks and territories, such as additional incentives, technical assistance, or deadline flexibility. Thus, the most vulnerable schools were left to their own devices. Evidence confirms that previous inequalities have intensified in the poorer regions due to the NEM.

By failing to consider the different initial contexts of schools, by adopting a centralizing logic, and by making the curriculum flexible without ensuring equity in its offering conditions, the New High School in Minas Gerais ended up reproducing and intensifying educational inequalities, rather than addressing them.

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