



Executive Summary

The organisation of learning environments is related to education outcomes. As in other organisations, decisions taken at one level in a school system are affected by decisions taken at other levels. For example, what happens in the classroom is influenced by decisions taken at the school level; and decisions taken at the school level are affected by the decisions – particularly those concerning resources, policies and practices – taken by district, regional and/or national education administrations.

Stratification in school systems, which is the result of policies like grade repetition and selecting students at a young age for different programmes or “tracks”, is negatively related to equity; and students in highly stratified systems tend to be less motivated than those in less-stratified systems.

In systems where students are more likely to repeat a grade, the impact of students' socio-economic status on their academic performance is stronger than in systems where this type of stratification is not practiced. In 35 of 61 countries and economies examined, when comparing two students with similar mathematics performance, the student who is more socio-economically disadvantaged is more likely to have repeated a grade. Across OECD countries, an average of 12% of students reported that they had repeated a grade at least once. Among the 13 countries and economies that had grade repetition rates of more than 20% in 2003, these rates dropped by an average of 3.5 percentage points by 2012, and fell sharply in France, Luxembourg, Macao-China, Mexico and Tunisia.

How resources are allocated in education is just as important as the amount of resources available to be allocated.

PISA results show that beyond a certain level of expenditure per student, excellence in education requires more than money. Among countries and economies whose per capita GDP is more than USD 20 000, including most OECD countries, systems that pay teachers more (i.e. higher teachers' salaries relative to national income per capita) tend to perform better in mathematics.

High-performing countries and economies tend to allocate resources more equitably across socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

That said, PISA results show that in many school systems, resources are not allocated equitably: On average across OECD countries, while disadvantaged schools tend to have smaller classes, they tend to be more likely to suffer from teacher shortages, and shortages or inadequacy of educational materials and physical infrastructures than advantaged schools.

Most countries and economies with comparable data between 2003 and 2012 have moved towards better-staffed and better-equipped schools.

Of the 36 countries and economies with comparable data for this period, 21 saw a reduction in student-teacher ratios; 20 of 38 countries and economies with comparable data saw a reduction in teacher shortages; and more school principals in 2012 than in 2003 reported that schools are in good physical condition.



Students in 2012 were more likely than their counterparts in 2003 to have attended at least one year of pre-primary education.

While more 15-old students reported to have enrolled in pre-primary education during the period, many of the students who reported that they had not attended pre-primary school are disadvantaged – the students who could benefit most from pre-primary education.

If offered a choice of schools for their child, parents are more likely to consider such criteria as “a safe school environment” and “a school’s good reputation” more important than “high academic achievement of students in the school”.

The criteria parents use to choose a school for their child not only vary across school systems, but also within systems. In all countries and economies with data from parents, socio-economically disadvantaged parents are more likely than advantaged parents to report that they considered “low expenses” and “financial aid” to be very important criteria in choosing a school.

In 37 participating countries and economies, students who attend private schools (either government-dependent or government-independent schools) are more socio-economically advantaged than those who attend public schools.

The difference in the average socio-economic status of students in private schools compared with those in public schools is particularly large in Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, Poland and Uruguay. Only in Chinese Taipei is the average socio-economic status of students who attend public schools more advantaged than that of those who attend private schools.

Schools in high-performing systems tend to have more responsibility for curricula and assessments.

Schools with more autonomy tend to perform better than schools with less autonomy when they are part of school systems with more accountability arrangements and greater teacher-principal collaboration in school management.

Between 2003 and 2012 there was a clear trend towards schools using student assessments to compare the school’s performance with district or national performance and with that of other schools.

On average across OECD countries, in 2003, 46% of students attended schools whose principal reported that the school uses student assessment data to compare itself against national or district performance; by 2012, 62% of students attended such schools. Similarly, the percentage of students who attended schools that use assessment data to compare themselves to other schools increased from 40% to 52% during the period. The use of student-assessment data to compare against national or regional benchmarks or with other schools increased most notably in Brazil, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal, and declined only in Finland between 2003 and 2012.

Systems with larger proportions of students who arrive late for school and skip classes tend to show lower overall performance.

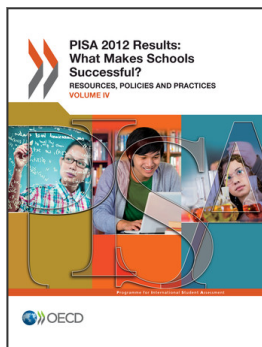
Schools with more student truancy and more disciplinary problems are also those with more socio-economically disadvantaged student populations. But even when comparing schools of similar socio-economic status, students in schools with more disciplinary problems tend to perform worse than their peers in schools with a better disciplinary climate.

According to students’ reports, teacher-student relations improved between 2003 and 2012 in all but one country, Tunisia, where they remained stable.

The share of students who “agree” or “strongly agree” that they get along with most teachers increased by 12 percentage points on average across OECD countries during the period and increased by more than ten percentage points in 22 countries and economies.

Between 2003 and 2012, disciplinary climate also improved on average across OECD countries and across 27 individual countries and economies.

Disciplinary climate improved the most in the Czech Republic, Hong Kong-China, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg and Norway, but deteriorated in Germany and Tunisia during the period. PISA results also show that in 45 countries and economies, schools whose student population is predominantly socio-economically disadvantaged tend to have a more negative disciplinary climate.



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