



Foreword

What wise parents want for their children is what the government should want for all children. Children from wealthier families will find many open doors to a successful life. But children from poor families often have just one chance in life, and that is a good school that gives them an opportunity to develop their potential. Those who miss that boat rarely catch up; in fact, this report provides compelling data on how subsequent education opportunities tend to reinforce social disparities that appear early in life.

All of this is well known, and yet in many countries, a student's or school's postal code is still the best predictor for the quality of the education that students acquire. It is particularly disappointing that surprisingly little headway has been made towards giving all children an equal chance to succeed. However, the fact that the impact of social background on educational success varies greatly across countries shows there is nothing inevitable about disadvantaged students performing worse than more advantaged students. Results from education systems as different as Estonia, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Viet Nam show that the poorest students in one region might score higher than the wealthiest students in another country. Within countries too, there are many students who succeed despite predicted failure. On average across OECD countries, more than one in ten disadvantaged students are among the top quarter of achievers in science.

This report looks at these issues in greater depth, and provides valuable lessons for policy that can be gleaned from the world's most equitable school systems. A first lesson is to start early, and promote access to the kind of childhood education and care that can help children acquire essential social and emotional skills, particularly children from disadvantaged families. Countries also need to set ambitious goals for and monitor the progress of disadvantaged students, target additional resources towards disadvantaged students and schools, and reduce the concentration of disadvantaged students in schools.

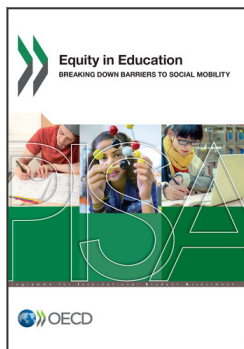
The more difficult but no less important policy levers revolve around human resources. This is about developing teachers' capacity to identify students' needs and to manage diversity in classrooms, to build strong links with parents, and to encourage parents to be more involved in their child's education. Teachers can also foster students' well-being and create a positive learning environment for all students by emphasising the importance of persistence, investing effort and using appropriate learning strategies, and by encouraging students to support each other, such as through peer-mentoring programmes.



Clearly, the most impressive outcome of world-class school systems is that they deliver high-quality education across the entire school system so that every student benefits from excellent teaching. Achieving greater equity in education is not only a social-justice imperative, it is also a way to use resources more efficiently, and to increase the supply of knowledge and skills that fuel economic growth and promote social cohesion. Not least, how we treat the most vulnerable students shows who we are as a society.

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