How are schools governed in different countries?

– *Most education systems now grant substantial autonomy over curricula and assessments to individual schools.*
– *Most school systems still have limited amounts of competition for student enrolment.*
– *More school autonomy and less school competition are characteristics of many high-performing school systems, but they do not guarantee strong reading performance.*

What it means

Countries that have devolved authority over curricula and assessments to individual schools tend to perform well in PISA. However, while the general trend has been towards greater autonomy, countries have taken different paths in how, and the extent to which, they devolve power to schools and create more competition among schools by allowing greater choice for parents and students. This analysis considers these differences by dividing countries into groups with similar combinations of characteristics.

Findings

Across OECD countries, the most common pattern is to give schools discretion over curricular and assessment decisions, but to restrict competition for enrolment among schools. School systems that opt for this combination of greater autonomy but less school competition tend to have relatively few private schools. Twenty-three OECD countries and 15 partner countries and economies share this configuration.

In another 4 OECD countries and 11 partner countries, both competition and autonomy are relatively restricted.

Six OECD countries and five partner countries and economies offer high levels of both autonomy and competition, either in the form of a high prevalence of private schools or greater competition among schools for enrolment. In these school systems, schools have the authority to design curricula, and parents and students can choose among a variety of schools for enrolment.

School systems with above-average performance levels and a relatively weak association between performance and students' socio-economic backgrounds tend to grant greater autonomy to schools in formulating and using curricula and assessments and have less school competition. However, not all OECD countries that share this configuration show above-average performance in reading. This suggests that while granting more autonomy and having less school competition is consistent with developing a successful school system, it does not automatically do so. Other conditions must also be in place for this configuration to be effective in improving performance and equity.

Definitions

Countries listed in the chart on the facing page are grouped on the basis of "latent profile analysis", a technique used to classify countries into a number of groups that share similar features in several aspects related to school governance.

Information on data for Israel: *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602*.

Going further

Further analysis is presented in Chapter 3 of *PISA 2009 Results Volume IV, What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices*. Data on autonomy and school competition in individual countries and economies are shown in Tables IV.3.6 to IV.3.8 at the back of that volume.

Table 4.4. **How school systems are governed**

This figure divides countries into groups with similar characteristics according to the amount of school autonomy and school competition.

					In a group of countries with *less* school competition…	In a group of countries with *more* school competition…
					…on average 73% of students are in schools that compete with other schools for enrolment… …and 8% of students are in private schools.	…on average 89% of students are in schools that compete with other schools for enrolment… …and 52% of students are in private schools.
In a group of countries with *less* school autonomy over curriculum and assessment...	…on average 61% of students are in schools that establish assessment policies…	…55% of students are in schools that choose which textbooks are used…	…14% of students are in schools that determine course content…	…and 18% of students are in schools that decide which courses are offered.	Greece, Mexico, Portugal, Turkey, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Jordan, Montenegro, Qatar, Serbia, Tunisia, Uruguay,	–
In a group of countries with *more* school autonomy over curriculum and assessment...	…on average 92% of students are in schools that establish assessment policies…	…97% of students are in schools that choose which textbooks are used…	…85% of students are in schools that determine course content…	…and 87% of students are in schools that decide which courses are offered.	Austria; Canada;** Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia;** Finland;** Germany; Hungary; Iceland;** Israel; Italy; Japan;** Luxembourg; New Zealand;* Norway;** Poland;* Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland;* United Kingdom; United States; Panama; Argentina; Brazil; Colombia; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Peru; Romania; Russian Federation; Shanghai, China;* Singapore;* Thailand; Trinidad and Tobago	Australia;* Belgium;* Chile; Ireland; Korea;** Netherlands;* Dubai (UAE); Hong Kong, China;** Indonesia; Macao, China; Chinese Taipei.

* Perform higher than the OECD average.

** Perform higher than the OECD average and where the relationship between students' socio-economic background and performance is weaker than the OECD average.

Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results, Volume IV, What Makes a School Successful?: Resources, Policies and Practices*, Figure IV.3.5, available at *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932343399*.

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