



Executive Summary

Promoting **excellence**, **equity** and **inclusion** are key aims for education. However, as the OECD's PISA student assessment shows, some education systems do better than others in achieving these often overlapping goals:

- **Excellence.** In five Asian economies and countries, more than 1 in 10 students performed at the highest level in mathematics in PISA 2012. By contrast, in 22 other PISA participants, fewer than 1 in 100 students performed at this level.
- **Equity.** Equity in education aims to ensure that *all* students reach a basic minimum level of skills and that students are not held back by personal or socio-economic circumstances. Social background is linked to student performance, but its impact can be reduced. In OECD countries, 6.5% of students beat the socio-economic odds against success; by contrast, in 7 East Asian countries and economies, 12.5% of students beat the odds.
- **Inclusion:** Education systems leave large numbers of students behind. In OECD countries, almost a quarter, or 23%, of students do not reach the baseline in mathematics performance in PISA, which can limit their future options in education and work.

This report, *Equity, Excellence and Inclusiveness in Education*, uses evidence from PISA and case studies from around the world to identify the characteristics of education systems that do most to achieve excellence, equity and inclusion. It focuses on three main areas: teaching quality, school organisation and the learning environment.

PROMOTE HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING

The performance of students is linked to the quality of teaching they receive, so it is important to hire high-quality graduates into teaching. But in many countries potential teachers may feel that the profession lacks status and is poorly paid – concerns that may not be unfounded. PISA shows a clear link between student performance and teacher status, with students doing better in school systems that spend more on salaries to attract quality teachers. Some priorities for policy and practice:

- **Ensure disadvantaged students have good teachers:** Teachers in disadvantaged schools are more likely to be inexperienced and less qualified than in wealthier schools. The ways in which schools are funded can help to offset this imbalance by shifting the funding balance more towards disadvantaged schools.
- **Address the needs of teachers in disadvantaged schools:** Much can be done during initial training and, later, through mentoring, to equip teachers with the skills to work in disadvantaged schools and an understanding of the social contexts of such schools and their students. Teachers are also more likely to want to work in disadvantaged schools if they feel they have support from principals, collaboration with colleagues and adequate resources as well as fair remuneration.
- **Encourage diversity in the teaching profession:** Teachers from minority backgrounds can serve as important role models for diverse students. However, most teachers in OECD countries are middle-aged, female and from the majority population group.
- **Improve employment conditions:** Teacher hiring may benefit from giving individual schools a greater role in recruitment and by providing potential hires with more information, such as on trends in the labour market and potential openings. Providing opportunities for greater mobility can help spread new ideas and approaches and improve teachers' career opportunities.



ENSURE SCHOOL AUTONOMY DOES NOT SACRIFICE EQUITY

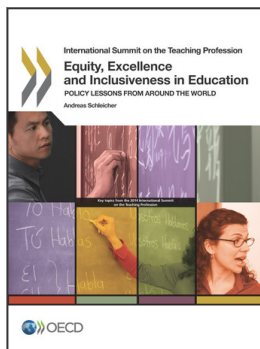
Reforms in recent decades have focused on giving schools greater autonomy in areas including the design of curricula and instruction, management of financial resources and recruitment of teachers. Results from PISA suggest that greater school autonomy is linked to higher student performance. However, in the absence of adequate accountability, it can also threaten equity by reinforcing socio-economic divisions between schools. Some priorities for policy and practice:

- **Avoid socio-economic segregation:** Many factors contribute to socio-economic gaps between schools, including residential segregation and wealthier families choosing not to send their children to schools with large numbers of disadvantaged and – in some cases – minority students. Responses can include mechanisms that allocate students more equitably between schools, financial incentives that encourage schools to offer places to disadvantaged or low-performing students and providing parents with vouchers or tax credits. Where school choice is increased, it is essential to ensure that all parents have adequate information about available options.
- **Invest in pre-school care and childhood:** Students who attend at least a year of pre-school education do better in PISA. Investing in pre-school care and education can bring important benefits, especially for children from disadvantaged families. However, care must be taken to ensure that targeted programmes do not stigmatise children. It is important, also, not to exclude children from moderately well-off families that may not qualify for state programmes but cannot afford private pre-school education.

CREATE EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

School systems manage the diversity of students' needs and abilities in different ways. Some mix students of differing abilities together, leaving it to each teacher and school to decide on how best to address their needs. Others group students of similar abilities together through tracking and streaming, sometimes making use of grade repetition. Evidence from PISA indicates that tracking and streaming may be linked to weaker student performance. They may also reinforce socio-economic divisions and undermine equity. Some priorities for policy and practice:

- **Limit grade repetition:** Grade repetition is financially costly and offers few academic benefits. Weaker students would benefit instead from additional instruction that supplements course work.
- **Reduce early tracking:** Students should not be placed on separate tracks at a very early age. At age 10 or 11, for example, most students are not yet ready to make choices about their future in education. Tracking also should not create dead ends by blocking students from pursuing upper secondary and tertiary education.
- **Support students continuously:** Struggling students can benefit from continuous monitoring that quickly identifies problems and ensures they receive adequate support, such as coaching, mentoring and counselling. Smoothing the transition to secondary school can also help, especially at a time of life when students are navigating adolescence.
- **Hold high expectations:** Despite their best intentions, teachers may have low expectations for disadvantaged students. This may influence what and how they teach as well as student self-esteem. Research suggests that all students, regardless of background, should follow a common curriculum and should be encouraged to achieve excellence.



From:
Equity, Excellence and Inclusiveness in Education
Policy Lessons from Around the World

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264214033-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Schleicher, Andreas (2014), "Executive summary", in *Equity, Excellence and Inclusiveness in Education: Policy Lessons from Around the World*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264214033-3-en>

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