

FOREWORD

The highest performing education systems are those that combine equity with quality. They give all children opportunities for a good quality education. This report presents policy recommendations for education systems to help all children succeed in their schooling. It looks into system level and school level policies to promote equity and quality. It also provides evidence on how to support disadvantaged students and schools, as improving opportunities for them benefits education systems and societies as a whole.

School failure penalises a child for life. The student who leaves school without completing upper secondary education or without the relevant skills has fewer life prospects. This can be seen in lower initial and lifetime earnings, more difficulties in adapting to rapidly changing knowledge-based economies, and higher risks of unemployment. The same child is also less likely to take up further learning opportunities and less able to participate fully in the civic and democratic aspects of modern societies.

Educational failure also imposes high costs on society. Poorly educated people limit economies' capacity to produce, grow and innovate. School failure damages social cohesion and mobility, and imposes additional costs on public budgets to deal with the consequences – higher spending on public health and social support and greater criminality, among others. For all these reasons, improving equity in education and reducing school failure should be a high priority in all OECD education policy agendas.

The evidence shows that equity can go hand-in-hand with quality; and that reducing school failure strengthens individuals' and societies' capacities to respond to recession and contribute to economic growth and social wellbeing. This means that investing in high quality schooling and equal opportunities for all from the early years to at least the end of upper secondary is the most profitable educational policy. Students who have enriching school experiences will be more likely to stay in education and successfully transfer to the labour market. Those who struggle at early stages but receive adequate, timely support and guidance have higher probabilities of finishing, despite any difficulties in their family or social background.

The current economic recession adds urgency to the task, with greater unemployment and increasing demand for higher level skills. Yet, while most education ministries highlight the reduction of school failure as a priority, OECD countries show little consistency in their policies and practices to support low performing disadvantaged schools and students. Challenges remain as to what types of policies and practices work best, and how to implement them.

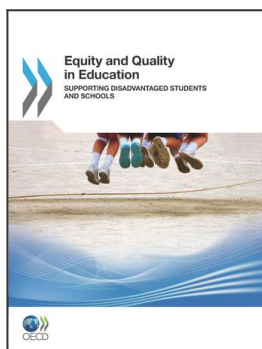
This comparative report gives evidence on the policy levers that can help overcome school failure and reduce inequities in OECD education systems. It focuses on the reasons why investing in overcoming school failure -early and up to upper secondary- pays off (Chapter 1), on alternatives to specific system level policies that are currently hindering equity (Chapter 2), and on the actions to be taken at school level, in particular in low performing disadvantaged schools (Chapter 3).

The report is the result of the thematic review, *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* and it builds on the conceptual framework developed in OECD's *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education* (2007) (see details of the review in Annex 1). Within the OECD Secretariat, Francisco Benavides, Pauline Musset, Anna Pons Vilaseca and Beatriz Pont are the authors of the report, and Elvira Berrueta-Imaz was responsible for the administration and layout of the report. All background reports, working papers and additional information on the review are available on the website: www.oecd.org/edu/equity.

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