



Is it Possible to Achieve both Academic Excellence and Social Equity? A Multi-Level Explanation of Math Performance of Canadian Students

Performance, Budgeting and Cost Efficiency in the Canadian Provinces

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While the parents of K-12 students are typically focussed on the private returns to academic achievement, governments are conscious of the public goods character of education, particularly the role of the education process in creating conditions of social equity. We define social equity as the extent to which the education outcomes of students are independent of the socioeconomic status of their parents. Although there is a large literature on student performance, much less attention has been paid to whether fostering academic excellence could come at the expense of social equity, or vice-versa. In this paper we employ a Hierarchical Linear Modelling technique to isolate the effect of individual-level and school-level factors on student math scores as captured in PISA evaluations. We find that public schools that achieve higher levels of social equity among students need not necessarily end up with a lower average academic achievement scores. Some schools are able to achieve both. But there are grounds to suspect that processes of self-selection have already sorted students into different types of schools. We find no correlation between a school's average academic achievement and its resources or practice indicators. On the other hand, the overall socio-economic status of students distinguishes schools from one another. Public policy that permits more school choice could be contributing to sorting effects. We conclude that in designing education policies, it is essential to understand the relationship between academic excellence and social equity and take into account the endogenous self-selection behavior of parents.