OECD ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

OVERCOMING SCHOOL FAILURE: POLICIES THAT WORK

OECD PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School failure penalises a child for life. The child who leaves school without qualifications faces weaker job prospects, lower income throughout working life and a smaller pension in retirement. The same child is also less likely to take up further learning opportunities and less able to participate on an equal basis in the civic and social aspects of modern society. Educational failure imposes very high costs to society. It limits the capacity for our economies to produce, grow and innovate, damages social cohesion and imposes additional costs on public budgets to deal with the consequences of school failure – increased criminality, higher public health spending, public assistance, etc.

Reducing education and school failure is a high priority in education policy agendas. Education and skills are increasingly valued in society, while the economic pressures generated by globalisation and increased migration pose important challenges to social cohesion. These trends increase the economic and social rationale for overcoming school failure. The current economic crisis adds urgency to the task with greater unemployment and a shift in the demand for skills. More families have become economically vulnerable and are unable to meet the costs of education. Yet, while most education ministries highlight the reduction of school failure as a priority, and evidence increasingly shows that policies do have an impact, challenges remain on what policies to implement, and how to implement them.

The OECD can promote policies to overcome school failure. The OECD project *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* provides evidence on the policies that are effective to reduce school failure, and proactively supports countries in promoting reform. The project builds on the conceptual framework developed in the OECD's *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education* (2007). School failure can be seen as twofold. Firstly, overcoming school failure implies ensuring a basic minimum standard education for each and every student (inclusion). Secondly, since not all individuals are equal, reducing school failure in a targeted way allows strengthening equality of opportunities (fairness).

This project is organized to make the most of the OECD's strengths—to provide a framework through which governments can compare experiences, seek responses to tackle common problems, and identify and share good practices. The project has two complementary strands of work designed to ensure both comparative analysis of policies that are successful in reducing education failure and national analysis and support towards action that different OECD and partner countries might carry out.

- **Comparative analysis:** This strand of the project will develop comparative analysis on the policy levers which can contribute to overcome school failure in schools and reduce inequities. It is based on participating country short background reports, data analysis, research and literature reviews, and will update the evidence, findings and implementation challenges presented in *No more failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education.*

- **National assessment seminars:** This strand is designed to support countries in the analysis and implementation of their particular challenges to overcoming school failure. National assessment seminars to raise awareness and support national discussion will combine international expertise and national dialogue to examine the situation in the host country, drawing on tools and expertise from the OECD. As a result of each *National Assessment Seminar*, the OECD will develop a *Note on Progress in Reducing School Failure*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Figures

Boxes

1. INTRODUCTION

1.   Education is fundamental in determining a child's adult life: indeed education is not only associated with higher income, but also with better health, and even longer life for individuals. For societies, education has been demonstrated to also contribute considerably to economic growth. Education has expanded considerably in the past fifty years. Nevertheless, even if more and more students finish school and enter tertiary education, many children are still left behind and exit the education systems without the skills that they will need for their adult life, representing a true handicap in terms of employment and life chances. Across OECD countries, nearly one out of three adults have only primary or lower secondary education.

2.   School failure can be defined as when a school system fails to provide services leading to successful student learning, or when a student is failing to advance to the next grade, and eventually becomes a dropout, both aspects being intrinsically linked (Psacharopoulos, 2007). All OECD member countries face the problem of school failure and dropout, its most visible manifestation: students who exit the school system before finishing secondary school or with lower quality qualifications, resulting in high costs not only for them, but for the society and the country as a whole. This phenomenon can be caused by a multitude of different factors: student-based, such as learning difficulties, heterogeneous educational needs; socio-cultural, related to students' family and socio-economic background and institutional: school-based, such as inadequate resources, incoherent curriculum, inappropriate teaching methods.

3.   The social and economic costs of school failure are extremely high, and take many different forms: increased criminality, lower rates of economic growth, lower intergenerational effects on children and parents, higher public health spending, higher unemployment, lower social cohesion (Psacharopoulos, 2007), and even lower participation in civic and political activities. Early school leavers have lower income jobs than secondary school graduates and pay fewer taxes. Since only half of high school dropouts have regular jobs (compared to 74 % for graduates), they are also more likely to rely on public assistance – in the case of unemployment, and on public health systems, and this require countries to make greater public expenditures (Levin, 2005). Their potential high criminality rate also results in higher police and criminal justice expenditure for countries (Psacharopoulos, 2007). Data collected by Rouse (2005) reveals that secondary school dropouts could be costing the United States 1.6% of the country's GDP.

4.   It is important to realize that children are not all equal in regard to education failure. Evidence shows that children from the poorest homes are more likely to have worse school results and to drop out of school more frequently than children that come from better-off families. As an education system is a fundamental lever to make a society more equitable, achieving fair and inclusive systems is a challenge that OECD countries cannot afford to neglect for economic and social reasons. It can be acknowledged that some progress has been made: women, for example, are moving ahead, and now have similar, or even higher educational attainment than men.

5.   But inequities in education remain important, and in some cases, the gap between educational attainment according to socio-economic background has even increased. To reduce social expenditures and attain fairness, school failure needs to be overcome. In fact, inequity in education is not inevitable. It is possible for countries, through targeted policies and practices, to move towards fairer and more inclusive systems. The OECD report (2007) *No More Failures: Ten steps to Equity in Education* presents a set of

policy levers that can contribute to overcome school failure and examples of country approaches such as the Finnish preventive approach.

6.	This is why putting into place policies to reduce school failure pays off in the long term: a secondary school graduate in the United States earns about $ 260.000 more than an early school leaver throughout his life; and pays about $ 60.000 more in taxes (Rouse, 2005), and means less spending in unemployment and welfare payments, and in public health expenditure (Levin, 2005). Earning differentials between those who have completed secondary school and the others are particularly pronounced in Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and the United States (OECD, 2009).

7.	The project *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* aims to provide assessment and assistance to countries in improving their policies and practices, so as to achieve real improvement in reducing educational failure and dropout rates. To do so, it will assess progress in education policies leading to reduced failure, using the Ten Steps to Equity in Education as a basis, analysing their implementation and impact when possible. The impact of the Ten Steps framework will be gauged when possible, and the obstacles with which countries have been confronted in school failure reduction will also be assessed. 8.	This policy framework is wide-ranging, and includes issues such as enhancing early childhood education and care, postponing early tracking and selection, providing options for school choice, developing specific strategies for the more at-risk groups, such as migrant students, etc. Understanding the challenges of implementing reforms in these areas, and identifying the policies that have been successful will also allow the OECD to strengthen its knowledge-base on policies to overcome school failure. This project is based on the idea that the OECD can provide effective support to countries on how to progress toward fair and inclusive education systems, which will be presented in a comparative report and developed for each country in national assessment seminars.

9.	The project focuses on the following questions:

- *Based on the framework presented in OECD's No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education, how can policies be more conducive to overcoming school failure across countries?*

- *Of the Ten Steps, which policies have countries implemented successfully, what challenges have they met, and what has been the impact of such policies?*

- *More specifically, what are the most effective strategies to support schools in achieving at least a minimum standard educational level for all students and in preventing dropout?*

10.	The project combines two main elements: a comparative analysis strand and a national assessment strand. The international comparative analysis looks at the policies that have been successful in reducing school failure, as well as the key challenges and potential obstacles in designing and implementing such policies. The national assessment strand consists of national seminars, designed to assist countries in the analysis of their particular challenges and the difficulties that they face in the adoption of policies to reduce school failure. They will bring together international expertise and national stakeholders, using the OECD *Ten Steps for Equity in Education* framework as a basis for analysis.

11.	This document presents the background for the project *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work*, a brief analytical framework, the types of outputs to be delivered and the methodology to be used. It presents the timeline and resources required. It is intended to motivate comments and feedback from countries to launch this project, in a way that responds to their specific needs.

2. BACKGROUND

12.   The Project *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* builds upon and complements recent work realized within the Education and Training Policy Division on equity in education. In 2007 the OECD *Review of Equity in Education* was completed. Ten countries participated: Belgium (Flanders), Finland, France, Hungary, Norway, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, by providing a country analytical report on equity in education in their specific context. In addition, five countries opted for a country review by OECD teams of experts: Finland, Hungary, Norway, Spain and Sweden. The objective of these visits was to assess policies by analysing the perspectives of different stakeholders and observing policies and practices in their specific context. These in-depth examinations led to the preparation of country notes and to the development of assessment and specific policy recommendations for these countries. The materials developed in this process – the analytical reports, the country notes, were then used to write an extensive comparative analytical report, *No More Failure: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, no longer set in the context of the ten participants to the OECD *Review on Equity in Education*, but broadened to the wider context of OECD countries. This report gave special attention to what the countries highlighted as important equity challenges and was designed to provide a framework in their policy development for countries, through the Ten Steps to equity in education framework.

13.   The findings of this report were presented in the Conference on *Fair and Inclusive Education* (Trondheim, June 2007), with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. Policy makers, academics and educational administrators from 22 countries exchanged their views on current policy issues and the challenges of equity and school failure. They also examined the set of policy orientations proposed by *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, on three policy levels: fair and inclusive design of education systems, in-school and out-of-school practices and resourcing in education.

14.   These broad topics were discussed again in 2009, at the Informal Meeting of OECD Ministers of Education in Oslo (9 and 10 July 2009): ministers discussed the issue of equity in education, and gave it high priority on their agenda. They expressed the need to focus their education policy "more on equity and not just on quantity and efficiency" and the need to reduce school failure. They also acknowledged the work carried out by the OECD in the field of equity, and encouraged the OECD to further investigate policies to improve equity in education. There was a general consensus that education systems that create efficient and equitable outcomes are key for economic prosperity and social cohesion: countries are increasingly placing education at the centre of their employment- and growth agendas. The Ministers also acknowledged that despite the existing high political interest in tackling educational failure, the results have not lived up to expectations. A greater effort is needed to design and implement policies and practices to respond to this challenge.

15.   More recently, the OECD international workshop "Taking stock of progress in overcoming school failure" (Paris, 11 and 12 February 2010) was organized to assess policies and practices that are effective in improving equity in education, and to introduce this project "Overcoming school failure: policies that work." It provided an opportunity for countries, representatives of international organisations and experts to exchange experiences and learn from each other on the policies they have implemented, their successes and continuing challenges. Improving equity, overcoming school failure, and decreasing the number of dropouts from upper secondary were confirmed as key policy priorities across OECD countries. During this meeting, the focus was narrowed to how to prevent dropout; school strategies to overcome failure, and how to resource schools and students better, in terms of teachers and funding strategies. These priorities are well aligned with the Ten Steps to Equity in Education framework, which covers fair structures, in and out of school practices and resources.

16.   The OECD team, experts and participants agreed that there are no "quick fixes" and that more evidence on policies that work, and especially on policy implementation is needed. Participants also agreed that the OECD can help in the task of identifying good policies and shedding light on effective implementation.

Why focus now on policies to reduce school failure?

17.   Much existing OECD work on education treats school failure issues in a transversal way. It is the case for example of the reviews on migrant education, early childhood education and care, teacher policy, learning for jobs, adult learning, as well as the results of several PISA studies. There is a need for a systematic approach geared towards policies intended to reduce school failure.

18.   The current economic turmoil, and its economic pressures, higher unemployment, as well as increased migrations, pose even bigger challenges to equity and social cohesion: more families are now economically vulnerable, and have extra difficulties in meeting the costs of education. In a more competitive labour market, skills and knowledge are also more important than ever. These underlying trends increase the economic and social rationale for actively reducing school failure and for supporting more equity in education: further awareness still has to be raised towards these issues, from governments and from citizens in general, and practical solutions still need to be presented.

3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

19.   The overall project aims to assist countries to improve their policies and practices, so as to reduce failure in schools. It builds on the *OECD Review of Equity in Education*, completed in 2007 and draws on other OECD work, including the *Review on Migrant Education*; *PISA analysis*, data and other evidence presented in *Education at a Glance*; and work on Early *Childhood Education and Care* and *Vocational Education and Training*. It will also draw on relevant work on inequality carried out elsewhere in OECD, including in the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.

20.   The OECD can help design and promote policies to reduce school failure, in a time when most governments and education ministries highlight equity in education as a priority. The main challenge for policymakers is to take action and to implement the right policies to prevent children from falling out of the system.

21.   The *OECD Review of Equity in Education* recommended a set of policies to improve equity in education and to reduce school failure, focusing on educational design for fair and inclusive education, fair and inclusive practices in and out-of-schools and resources to strengthen equity in education.

Box 1. The Ten Steps to Equity in Education

The report *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education* argues that education systems need to be fair and inclusive in their design, practices, and resourcing. It advances ten steps – major policy recommendations which would reduce school failure and dropout, make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.

Design

1.   Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection
2.   Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity
3.   In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout
4.   Offer second chances to gain from education

Practices

5.   Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition
6.   Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn
7.   Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education

Resourcing

8.   Provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling
9.   Direct resources to the students or schools with the greatest needs, so that poorer communities have at least the same level of provision as those better-off and schools in difficulty are supported
10. Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts

The report advances recommendations on priorities for spending within a limited budget, allowing for public expenditure constraints. Actual costs or savings arising from these recommendations have not been estimated, as they will depend on national contexts

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22.   Since these recommendations were presented, the economic and financial crisis has pushed the need to reduce school failure to the forefront. In many cases, countries have attempted different strategies, but despite these efforts, too little progress has been achieved: there are obstacles and challenges in the design and implementation of policies that tackle this issue. The project *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* aims to revisit the Ten Steps – updating and reshaping them, according to the new evidence that is available, and to fine-tune them, with the benefit of experience. Its objective is also to deepen what we know about country practices, and to analyse if there are any additional policies that needs to be taken into account. The project aims also to provide countries with tailor-made advice on how to design and model their policies, as well as on how to overcome barriers to implementation, Countries need more information on how to apply the "No More Failures" principles and how to convert them into actual policies and practices that are viable and efficient "in-the-field".

23.   The factors that cause school failure are deeply intertwined: factors within the education system, such as curriculum, structure, quality of teaching, school-level factors, and individual student factors, notably the student's family socio-economic background. The reduction of school failure has been promoted through various types of policies and practices, directed at specific schools, at specific student populations, or at specific individual students (remedial policies).

24.   It is fundamental to examine why some policies work and others do not and to share this practical knowledge, as in *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. What are the ingredients of the policies that have been successful? To bring together the collected evidence on these practical policy findings would help future policy development, to make them more efficient in overcoming school failure. But to understand why some policies work in a precise setting, and why some do not, it is necessary to take into account the particular context of each country, and target their specific challenges. Indeed, the stakes are high: how can an efficient and equitable education system be achieved in practice, a system that leaves no one behind? This question is even more urgent since despite increased and sustained investment in education in the majority of the OECD countries, the achievement gap between socio-economic groups and school types seems to be widening (Matear, 2007). Since the causes of school failure are multiple and complex, solutions cannot be simplistic or one-dimensional.

25.   In order to respond to the challenge of overcoming school failure and following the Ten Steps framework, the project:

- Updates research and country practices on issues related to school failure, revising the Ten Steps as appropriate

- Identifies innovative and successful policies and practices

- Facilitates exchanges of lessons and policy options among and within countries

- Provides a framework for national discussion and policy implementation for governments, allowing a focus on the country's specific issues.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY ISSUES

26.   This section presents an overall framework for the project, as well as examples of the types of issues and concerns that are likely to be addressed in this activity.

4.1. Defining school failure and equity in education

27.   This project builds on the conceptual framework developed in the OECD's *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*[1]. Equity in education includes two dimensions that are closely linked: equity as fairness and equity as inclusion. Fairness implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to educational success, and inclusion implies ensuring a minimum standard of education for all (Field *et al*, 2007). Consequently, equity in education demands that students' expected learning outcomes should depend only on their own effort and capacity, and not on considerations over which they have no influence (gender, ethnic origin, family's socio-economic level). The concept of equity in education goes hand in hand with the concept of equality of opportunities (Nusche, 2009). It is not only desirable from an economic and social point of view, but also constitutes a human rights imperative.

Box 2. How to define school failure and equity?

School failure can be seen as twofold. On the one hand, **from a systemic perspective**, school failure is the failure of an educational system, which is unable to provide an education of quality to all. In this case, overcoming school failure implies assuring **inclusion**: ensuring a basic minimum standard education for each and every student. Secondly, not all individuals are equal facing failure, and consequently, to reduce school failure in a targeted way allows to strengthen equality of opportunities, and to make education system **fairer**. Therefore, to reduce school failure implies improving both dimension of equity: **inclusion and fairness**.

On the other hand, school failure can also be apprehended **from an individual perspective**, as failure of a student in obtaining a minimum necessary standard or, in the extreme, dropping out.

Educational failure and inequity are thus intrinsically linked and overcoming school failure not only implies the strengthening of equity in education but the reduction of its high social and economic costs.

4.2. Why does equity in education matter? Why should countries invest in reducing school failure?

28.   Equity in education is fundamental because education plays a role in changing patterns of inequality. Education is a powerful tool to act upon the problems of poverty and income disparities. Education systems that allow equitable outcomes are key for both economic prosperity and social cohesion (Wößmann, 2008). There is also evidence that education is one of the major drivers of intergenerational social and income mobility (Causa and Chapuis, 2009).

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[1] This report was the result of the OECD *Thematic Review of Equity in Education*, as mentioned earlier, in which ten countries participated.

29.   The returns on education in the form of increased productivity translate in higher wages. Two interesting cases are Australia and Canada, two countries that have high intergenerational income mobility and moderate income inequality (Wilkie, 2007). This high income mobility is achieved thanks to high minimum standards of education outcomes that are not related to parents' socio-economic background. This suggests that a child from less advantaged background does not get an education inferior to that of a child whose parents have higher incomes. Since higher educational outcomes are normally associated with higher incomes, income mobility is higher. Therefore, quality education for all results in not only a school system where no one gets left behind, but also in a more equitable society where people can improve their socio-economic situation on merit.

30.   As mentioned earlier, for individuals that do not finish school, there is an expected lower quality of life and a loss in individual life chances, in terms of both employment opportunities and wages. Indeed, the development of today's knowledge societies has raised the value of education and skills (Field *et al*, 2007) and the persistence of school failure for a country has heavy costs. In their book, Belfield and Levin (2007) analyse the large body of research literature on the economic and social consequences of inadequate education, and establish that insufficient education – in both quantity and quality – leads to large public and social economic costs. Indeed, school failure translates in lower incomes, and therefore reduced tax revenues, but also higher expenditure in public services, such as health care and public assistance. This results in an inefficient use of national resources. Furthermore, since education has been found to be determinant for economic growth, school failure also results in a loss of productivity at the national level (Dowrick and Crespo, 2007).

31.   In conclusion, a fair and inclusive education system is a policy priority for countries: it is desirable for societies, both socially and economically, to promote efficient and equitable school systems. School systems aspire to give equal opportunities for all, regardless of socio-economic background and they play a fundamental role in providing an equal starting point in life for all.

4.3. A snapshot of inequity in education

32.   In all of the OECD countries, there is a significant relationship between student performance and family socioeconomic background. PISA shows clearly- and for each and every participating country, that students with lower socioeconomic status have weaker literacy and numeracy skills on average than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

33.   The strength of this relationship varies from country to country, in a quite considerable way, which means that some countries are more successful than others in reducing the disparities in student outcomes linked to the socio-economic background.

Figure 1. How social background affects performance in science

Relative chances of students in lowest and highest socio-economic group ending up with a lower performance in sciences, based on test scores from PISA (2006)
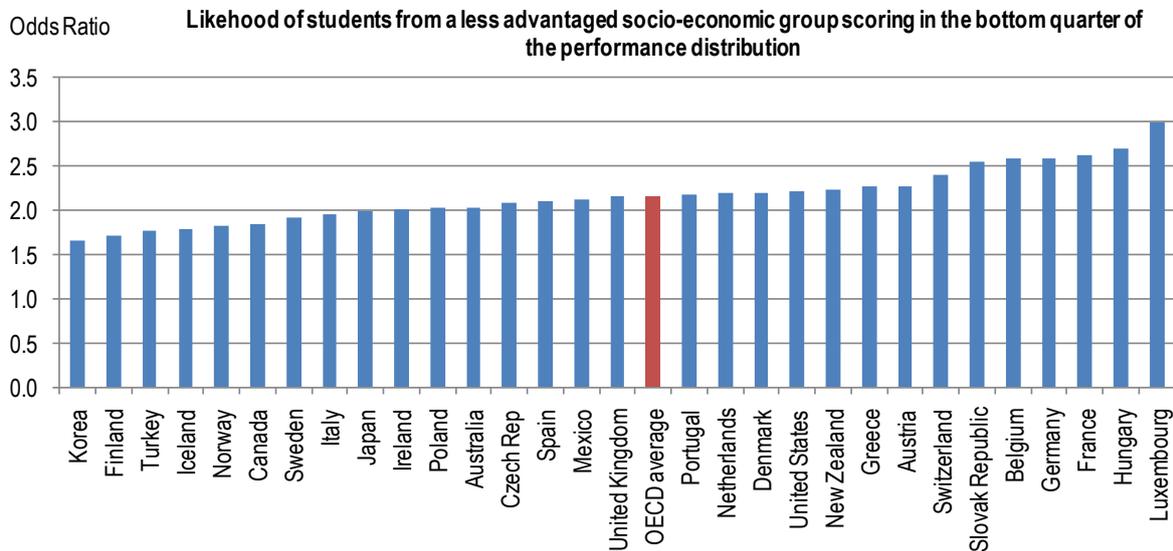

This chart measures the effects of social background on outcomes in sciences. For example, in Luxembourg a student from the most disadvantaged background is three times more likely to be among the lowest quarter of performers than a student from the most advantaged background.

Source: OECD (2007), PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World, volume 2, OECD, Paris.

Exclusion in education

34.   Many adults and young people remain un- or under-qualified: nearly one out of three adults have only primary or lower secondary education across the OECD (OECD, 2009). Many students struggle with reading, and this represents a major handicap in the 21st century labour market. The situation is however very different among OECD countries, which shows the importance – and the efficiency- of having polices to tackle exclusion in education.

Figure 2. How many students struggle with reading?

Percentage of students below and at Level 1 of proficiency in the OECD PISA reading scale (2006)
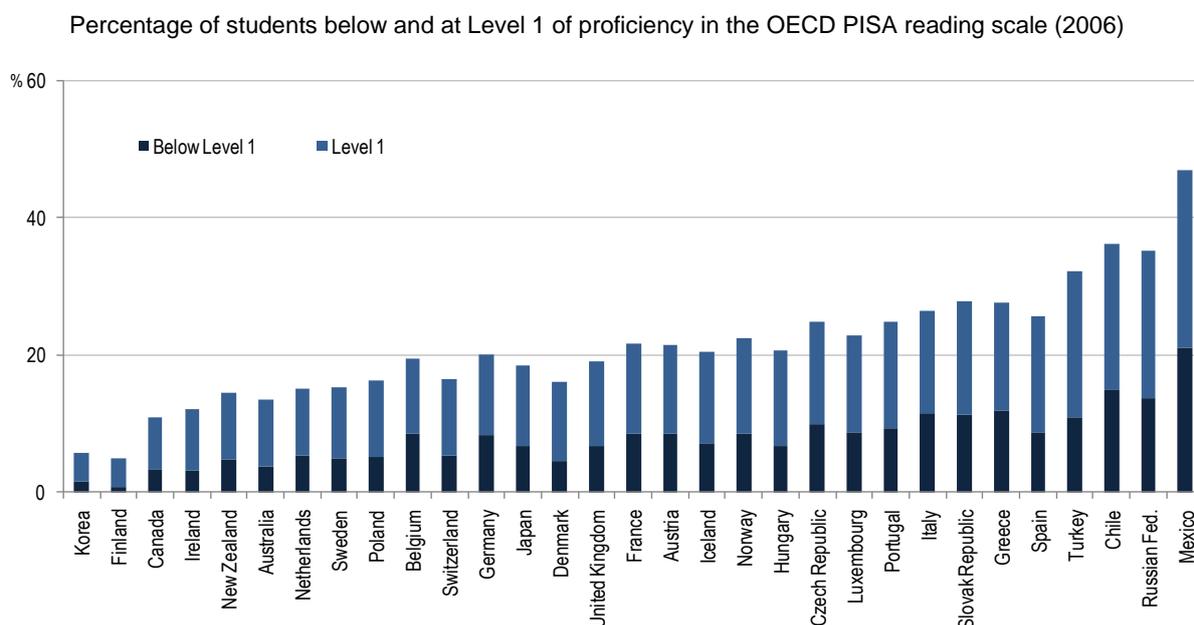
The PISA scale has six levels of proficiency. Level 2 represents the baseline at which students begin having skills that allow them to use reading actively. Level 1 and below imply insufficient reading skills to function in today's societies.

Source: OECD (2007), PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World, Volume 1, OECD, Paris.

No trade-off between equity and efficiency

35.   It is common knowledge to think that there is a trade-off between efficiency and equity but in reality this relationship can take many different forms: in some cases, equity and efficiency are independent of each other. Certain educational policies can bring education systems to a higher level of efficiency, without having a negative impact on equity; in the same way, some policies can make systems more equitable without hindering efficiency. Equity and efficiency are complementary in economic development (World Bank, 2005), and the same can be said for education. The evidence reviewed by Wößmann (2008) shows that countries can combine equity and efficiency concerns in their educational policies, thanks to comprehensive policy designs.

36.   School failure is expensive, not only for the ones who are directly involved but for society as a whole: it limits the capacity of our economies to produce, grow and to innovate; it damages social coherence, and it imposes additional costs on public expenditure to deal with the consequences of failure that pass on through time. Putting in place reasonably priced and effective measures to correct inequity would improve equity and efficiency.

Policies for diversity

37.	Not all groups are equal when facing educational failure, a particularly eye-opening case of the extent of inequity are migrants. In most OECD countries, migrant students tend to have lower education performance than native students, as it has been consistently shown in the PISA studies: first generation migrant children have PISA scores 58 points lower that native children, a lag that is equivalent to 1.5 years of schooling (OECD, 2007). They also tend to drop out of school more frequently, and to leave school earlier: for the European Union countries, the probability that a young migrant will drop out is more than double than for a native student (European Commission, 2009). Furthermore, their access to high quality education also tends to be restricted by factors such as residential segregation, tracking and streaming, resources inequality, selective mechanisms (Nusche, 2009).

Figure 3. How do migrant students perform at school?

Student performance on the science scale by immigrant status (2006)
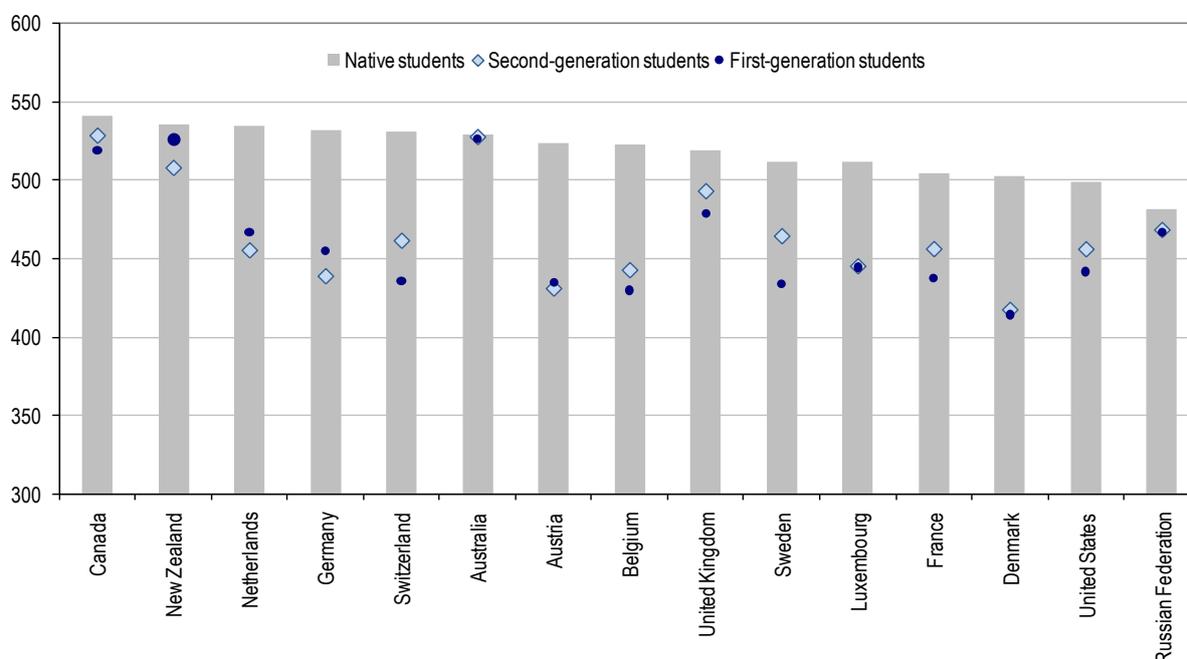
Source: OECD (2007), PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World, Volume 1, OECD, Paris.

38.	Nevertheless, this situation is not inevitable. In some countries, there are no performance differences between migrant and native students (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand). This shows that there are solutions- through policies and practices, to tackle this particular equity challenge. It has to be acknowledged that the presence of significant numbers of migrant students has substantial implications for education systems. Key challenges are how to prevent the creation of segregated school settings, how to deal with an increased number of mother tongues and intercultural environments, as well as to build bridges between schools and migrant families (European Commission, 2008).

39.   Another issue often covered is that of special needs students. Evidence (Field *et al*., 2007) shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and especially students from migrant and minority groups are more likely than others to be diagnosed as "special needs students" and be taken out of mainstream education and placed in special institutions. At the same time, students with learning disabilities are not always placed in the appropriate education structures to receive them.

40.   In addition, in some OECD countries, education systems have to deal with a very particular issue, also linked to diversity, the one of indigenous education. The challenges faced by indigenous students are often completely different from those of migrant students. Very little quantitative and qualitative research is available on improving the educational outcomes of indigenous students, but to put into place successful policies would allow building stronger futures for indigenous populations.

4.4. Policies to overcome school failure: key issues following the Ten Steps

41.   As noted earlier, the project, *Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work* is focused on the impact of policy in addressing school failure as well as on examples of successful policy implementation. For example Finland has successfully tackled drop out and school failure. Their measures are both targeted and universal; the strategy is to intervene with young people who have fallen behind as well as to reform the school system as a whole (Sahlberg, 2009). In the 1970s, Finland changed the age at which students choose a pathway from 11 to 16 and put into place a uniform curriculum for lower secondary school. These measures have improved equity, moving all students to higher levels of achievement (Pekkarinin *et al* (2006) in Nusche, 2009). Today, only 1 % of Finish 15-years are unable to demonstrate basic reading skills, as opposed to 7 % across the OECD countries.

42.   Causa and Chapuis (2009) show that strong education policies can have an impact on promoting greater equity of outcomes among students of different socio-economic background. Their findings for the OECD countries show that, on average, for an improvement for one international standard deviation in a student's socio-economic background, the student's PISA score improves by 40 points. But what is even more interesting is that the analysis of cross-country differences show that countries are extremely heterogeneous, with respect to the impact of the socio-economic background on the student results: the PISA score differences go from 25 points (Mexico) to 54 (France). While in Nordic countries (as well as Canada and Australia), family background has a relatively low impact on student results, in continental and southern Europe (Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Italy), family background has a strong one. The Anglo-Saxon countries and Poland hold an intermediate position (Causa & Chapuis, 2009).

43.   As for countries, the main challenge is to know what policies to implement, and how to implement them, the project *Overcoming SchoolFailure: Policies that Work* looks to provide evidence on policies that are effective in reducing school failure and support countries in promoting reform and implementing effective policies. The following sections review the key policy recommendations of Ten Steps to Equity providing evidence, observations and questions about how each is implemented based on the data gathered since the report was published.

Structuring education systems to prevent school failure

44.   In *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, the first four steps are policy recommendations on how to design a school system that is fair and inclusive.

- *Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection.*
- *Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity.*
- *In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout.*
- *Offer second chances to gain from education.*

45.   Many OECD educational systems are facing challenges related to the streaming and clustering of students according to student characteristics. Indeed, academic selection and school choice have an impact on educational inequities, as any given pathway and any given school affects learning in two ways. Firstly, the teaching environment can vary, since it depends on the curriculum, the teachers and the resources. Secondly, students' outcomes can also be affected by the students alongside them (Field *et al.*, 2007).

46.   Polarized school systems, in which more well-off students and more disadvantaged students are enrolled in different schools, can be due to academic selection within the education system as well as the spatial distribution of populations, with a tendency for different social groups to live in different areas (Field *et al.*, 2007). The situation varies largely across OECD countries: in the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, and Sweden), schools have quite similar social composition, whereas in countries like Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Mexico and Turkey, the social differences between schools are very significant.

47.   It is usual for education systems to sort students into different pathways and institutions, according to their performance. These policies, broadly referred to as "ability grouping" determine the way students are put together or directed to separate classrooms, pathways and schools according to their abilities, and have an impact on equity and on educational failure. The timing and extent of streaming and tracking of students into different paths varies across the OECD countries: students, sometimes very young, are split into, typically, vocational and academic tracks, but also between schools, or grades accordingly to their outcomes. Countries like Sweden do not track their students among different paths during the years for which schooling is compulsory; on the other hand, countries like Germany and Austria track their students as early as 10-years-old (OECD, 2007).

48.   This grouping of students according to their abilities is frequently reported as hindering equity in education. Indeed, some studies confirm that early tracking policies (for example at the age of 10 to 12) increase the spread of educational outcomes and clearly harm children with lower abilities, since they cannot benefit from the positive effect of being around more able peers (Hanushek and Woessmann (2006), Ammermueller (2005)). The possible explanations suggest that less demanding tracks provide in some cases less stimulating learning environment. Also, being flagged as a "low-ability student" can lead students to lose motivation for school, especially at an early age, since they internalize lower educational attainment expectations. These students fall more and more behind, aggravating the initial inequality, and, in many cases, end up dropping out.

49.   Children that come from a low socio-economic background are especially disadvantaged in early tracking systems: in some environments, they are disproportionally grouped in the least academically oriented track (Resh, 1998; Mickelson, 2001; Prenzel et al., 2005; Strand, 2007 in Nusche, 2009). This early tracking, especially when it happens at a very young age, may lock them in a lower educational environment before they have had a chance to develop the linguistic, social and cultural skills to attain their maximum potential (Entorf and Lauk, 2006 in Nusche, 2009). In general, advocates of tracking regimes argue that education is more efficient that way because classrooms are more homogeneous, which result in a higher level of mean student achievement. International studies on the impact of tracking on equity and educational achievement in general provide mixed evidence, according to the methodology and data used (Jakubowski, 2010) and further research is needed in this field.

50.   Academic selection and tracking policies have to be thought through with caution, and their consequences carefully assessed. This issue was studied and presented in *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, and the conclusions presented suggest that the key issue is the need to rise the age of early tracking, as children at very early ages may not be in a position to make the best choices. In fact, many OECD countries have introduced comprehensive education measures, and raised the age of the first tracking or postponed it to a later stage of the educational process.

51.   Several countries in the past have postponed the age of tracking: Sweden in the 1950s replaced tracking at age 12 with a more comprehensive system, improving both overall student outcomes and equity. Finally, a more recent and very interesting example is the case of Poland: in 2002, tracking was postponed, from age 14 to 15 (Nusche, 2009). Analysis from the 2000, 2003 and 2006 PISA scores show that this reform seems to be associated with improvement in the outcomes of the lower performers, without hindering the performance of the top achievers (OECD, 2007). Nevertheless, policy alternatives still need to be explored about how to reduce school failure in a tracking system context.

52.   To some extent, all the potential risks to equity associated with ability grouping also apply for selective school systems. But choice, in terms of pathways and schools, is also important. To ensure that all students have access to an optimal quality school, many OECD countries have introduced school choice mechanisms, to ensure that parents can decide which school they want their children to attend, independent of the catchment area in which they live. Advocates say that school choice allows improving efficiency in education, since it enhances competition between schools and so pushes schools to improve their educational quality, while reducing costs (Nusche, 2009).

53.   But school choice is often criticized for its negative consequences on equity. Many fear that if parents can choose which school their children will attend, this will damage equity. The well-off families would choose to send their children to the best schools, and this cream-skimming would increase segmentation between schools on socio-economic criteria, with as a consequence, adverse effects on the more disadvantaged children. In many OECD countries, there is a growing gap between private schools (in some countries, publically funded), and public schools, which enrol a higher proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This type of selection tends to accelerate the progress of those who have already gained the best start in life from their parents. Research shows that greater choice in schools is linked with larger differences in the social composition of different schools. School systems, especially at the secondary level, with large social differences between schools, tend on average to have lower outcomes. In the same way, academic selection by school systems is associated with great social differences between schools and a stronger effect of socio-economic status on performance, but also with a stronger performance at the top end of the scale in mathematics and science.

54.	Since school choice can represent a risk to equity, it has to be managed carefully. Policies that allow school choice without creating bigger differences in the social composition of different schools have to be thought of. The range of these policies seems to be wide, and their scope and target can be very different: selection methods such as lottery arrangements or financial premiums for more disadvantaged students for example can be a way to ensure a more even social mix in schools. In systems that are already very segregated, introducing mobility through a well-designed voucher system can serve equity goals. Some evidence shows that the voucher plan approach produces superior results – in terms of freedom of choice, equity, efficiency and social cohesion than an exclusively public school system (Levin and Schwartz, 2007). These policies that allow increasing social mix in schools, while authorizing school choice, are found to reduce socio-economic segregation between schools without affecting the overall performance, and are particularly efficient in countries where segregation is high.

Learning in and out-of-the-classroom to prevent failure

55.	Practices in and out-of-the-classroom have a direct impact on school failure. In *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, the steps 5 to 7 refer to policies and practices that affect directly what happens in schools, and the relationship between parents, communities and schools:

- *Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition.*
- *Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.*
- *Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education.*

56.	When a child faces learning difficulties at the level of a school, two types of responses are possible. He can be moved to a different learning environment, a special needs institution, for example, or he can repeat a year, staying in the same learning environment. In some OECD countries (France, Mexico, Spain), more than 20 % of students have repeated a grade during their primary and secondary school (Field *et al.,* 2007). The evidence on the effectiveness of repeating a year is mixed, but it seems that this practice is ineffective in getting these failing students to perform better, and is costly for the educational system. Some research also shows that socio-economic background, in both France and the United States, is an important determinant of repeating, which hinders equity.

57.	Despite the steady rise in completion of upper secondary education in OECD member countries, early school leaving continues to be a fairly widespread problem. Even if in the last twelve years, the proportion of students finishing secondary school has grown by 7 % on average in OECD countries, and in 22 countries, graduation rates exceed 70 % (OECD, 2007); the successful completion of basic education is still a challenge for many countries. Between 5% and 40% of students drop out of school in OECD countries.

Figure 4. How many students did not obtain an upper secondary education?

Proportion of 25-34 years-old that do not have at least upper secondary education
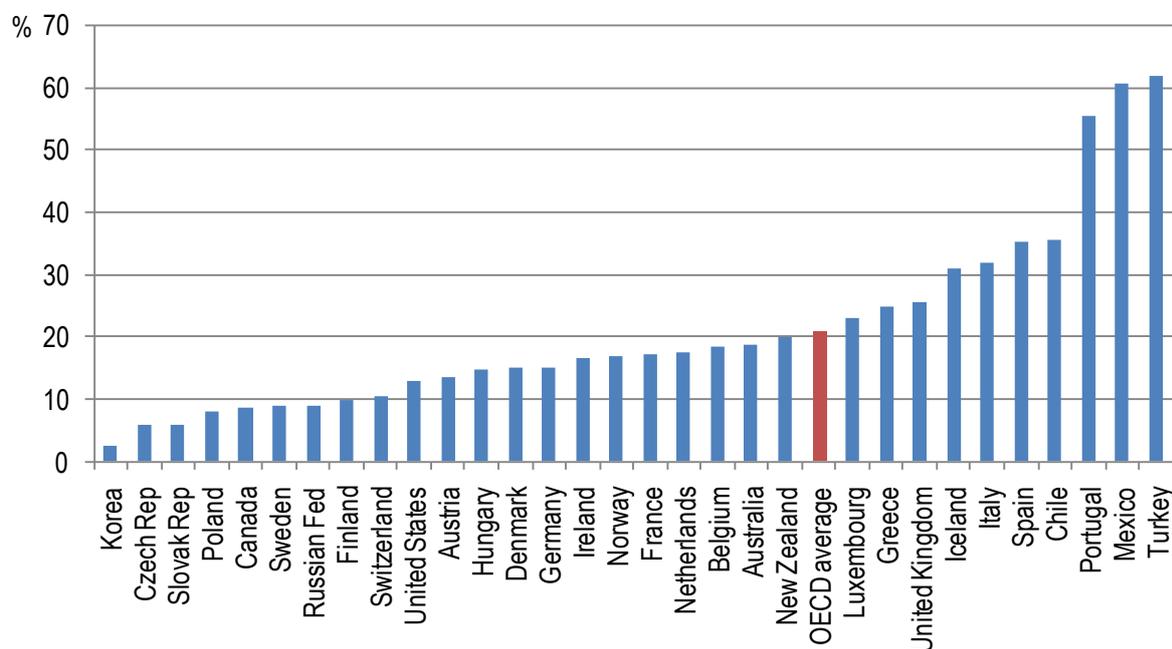
Source: OECD (2007), PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World, Volume 1, OECD, Paris

58.   Against a background of long-term steady decline in youth employment prospects that have tended to dampen the incentives for young people to leave school and seek employment, governments and educators in member countries have tried two broad classes of strategies over the years to encourage retention through the end of secondary education: early warning systems to identify youths at risk of dropping out and to provide remediation; changes in the school programme and curriculum to adapt to make upper secondary education more appealing and better adapted to a broad range of learning needs and preferences.

59.   The students who drop out go on to have low skills and suffer high rates of unemployment. In 2008, only 55 % of those who had dropped out in the EU were employed, the rest being either unemployed or outside the labour market, and therefore at high risk of social exclusion (European Commission, 2009). Among other factors, dropout is fed by disenchantment with school, lack of support, negative learning experiences and repeating years. It has huge costs, for the young that drop out, but also for the society as a whole. In OECD countries, 42 % of the 25-64 year-olds with less than an upper secondary qualification are not employed (OECD, 2009). On the other hand, only 24 % of the 25-64 years old with at least upper secondary education are in the same situation.

60.   There are preventive policy options to tackle the issue of early school leavers that are worth exploring, as early identification of students at risk (through for example the compilation of information on attendance, performance and active involvement in school activities) and individual support. Indeed, it is much more efficient –in terms of human and financial resources, to tackle problems early, before they get amplified.

61.   Early warning systems require a data system that tracks individual student performances, in order to "flag" the student who is falling behind and a reporting system (the compilation of information on

attendance, performance and active involvement in school activities). In the United States, the National High School Center has created an "Early Warning System" that assesses every student on the criteria of attendance, GPA, student engagement, and discipline data, three times a year. Once a student at-risk is identified, he is reported to the school's Dropout Prevention Team that combines individual programs to catch up, counseling and guidance.

62.   Most dropouts happen in the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education, a crucial step where there is a true risk of seeing those who are least engaged in school dropout completely. In many countries, specific programmes exist to re-integrate into mainstream education those who are on the verge of falling completely out, through counselling and guidance. Indeed, mentoring and counselling are effective in reducing dropout, when they are of sufficient quality and adequate to the student's needs. The National Dropout Prevention Centre, from the United States, compiles data on these kinds of programs, and rates their efficiency. It has rated more than 100 programs as having strong evidence of their efficiency in reducing dropout. Another study (Hammond *et al.,* 2007) reviews the characteristics of the "best practice" programs that are oriented toward the early prevention of youth at risk in schools: the programme is provided by quality staff and it counts with technical assistance and monitoring of staff to ensure progress, the programme was delivered as it was designed, it is of a certain length and is intensive.

63.   As for programmes to assure the completion of basic education*,* Sweden has designed an individual program for students who do not meet the requirements to enter upper secondary school, but wish to do so (Field *et al*, 2007). In a similar way, France has a programme (les *dispositifs relais*) that aims to reintegrate students who are failing school at the lower secondary level (absenteeism, behavioural problems, and profound lack of motivation). This programme has been proven effective: 77 % of students participating (about 7900 for 2007-2008, in more than 400 *relais* classes) were able to re-enter mainstream education, and 19 % special needs education. Only between 1 and 2 % of the participants were not integrated in any education programme afterwards.

64.   Another strategy that can lead to dropout reduction is to change the content of particular subjects in order to make upper secondary more appealing to a broader cross-section of learners, including those at risk of dropping out. In the United States, for example, the integration of mathematics in career and technical education (vocational education and training) was developed across the curriculum to help improve students' understanding of mathematics - both in and out of their work context.

65.   Programs that engage students in new ways prevent those uninterested in academic education from dropping out. Brunello and Checchi (2007) found in a comparative study that countries that offered good quality and attractive vocational training programmes managed to reduce the impact of socio-economic background on student attainment. During the OECD Informal Ministerial on improving equity in education, this was a key area of discussion. Ministers highlighted not only the need for more quality vocational education and training, but also of providing diverse and equivalent pathways in upper secondary education. Additional pathways may be linked to the world of work, such as apprenticeships or other combination of programmes that can motivate and encourage students towards completion.

66.   Nevertheless, in some countries, vocational education programs suffer from problems of low quality and prestige; education systems need to rethink their design, in order to make them more attractive and suited to the labour market needs. Better quality in vocational training programs would lead to a stronger appraisal from the students, and to possibly higher level of participation in this kind of programs. It would also make them more attractive to potential employers.

67.   A different approach to making the schooling experience more appealing is to offer a structured 'break year' between lower and upper secondary education (when most students are around age 15). Widely offered in the Nordic countries, the extra year occurs at the end of the comprehensive stage of education and before differentiation into academic and vocational tracks occurs. The purpose varies but generally is intended to offer students the opportunity for remedial work on subjects in which they are having difficulty as well to take part in community activities and pursue interests that are outside the curriculum. Though the optional year in Denmark has been criticised on efficiency grounds because it is not targeted to students in difficulty and prolongs education (OECD, 2009), it is popular with secondary students (more than half take the optional year) and is seen as being a strength of the secondary system because students make better-informed choices about subsequent studies. The break year is considered a factor in explaining the comparatively good upper secondary completion rates in the Nordic countries.

68.   But it is important to note that even in the countries with high rates of upper secondary completion, there are non-negligible numbers of youths who drop out. There have been some promising steps to reduce the penalty of dropping out by making it easier for younger as well as older adults to drop back into education. Since the price of dropout is so high, it is extremely important to provide second chances for those who wish to come back into the education system. "Back-on-track" programs have to be designed comprehensively, in a broader context of lifelong learning (European Commission, 2008). For example, Norway is currently piloting a measure that enables students to leave upper secondary education early, but provides them with qualifications facilitating re-entry: the certificate of practice (*Praksisbrev*). Targeting pupils with poor motivation, the initiative enables them to obtain a certificate after two years of practice-based upper secondary training (instead of two years in school followed by two years of apprenticeship). This certificate of practice is a possible stepping-stone for further upper secondary education and training.

69.   Access to higher education remains a challenge for many students. Barriers are particularly important for students from low SES-background –as well as students that are the first in their family to attain that academic stage. Even if academic preparation accounts for some of these differences, the differences in college-going rates persists between these groups even after controlling for academic preparation (US Department of Education, 2009).

70.   Research shows that close interaction between school leaders, teachers, families and communities encourages more positive attitudes toward school, reduces dropout and overall improves academic achievement. Indeed, parents' communication and encouragement contribute to their children's educational attainment (Field *et al*, 2007). There are two key methods regarding parent involvement in schools : reforms that aim to include parents in school governance and mechanisms to enable parents better to support their children's learning at school but especially at home in their extra-curricular activities and homework, which leads to a reduction of school failure.

How to distribute resources to overcome school failure

71.   The way in which resources are distributed in school systems have profound implications on equity and school failure. In *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, the final steps refer to resources:

- *Finance a strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling.*
- *Direct resources to the students or schools with the greatest needs, so that poorer communities have at least the same level of provision as those better-off and schools in difficulty are supported.*
- *Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts.*

72.   It is often hard, especially in times of crisis, for countries to justify increases in educational spending although such increases can contribute to economic growth in the long term. Countries need to target educational expenditures, specifically across education stages (ECEC, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) and in specific geographic areas (impoverished areas, isolated countryside, etc.). Higher spending on one stage has implications for the other ones, since individual students move from one stage to the next. This is why it is fundamental for school systems to develop a systemic strategy, in terms of funding and of targeting. Evidence shows that to focus on providing a healthy, caring and education environment for very young children is particularly efficient in reducing school failure, and also allows to improve equity.

73.   What is learned at one stage of the education continuum is an input to the learning process of the next step. Early childhood education is very important; indeed, the participation of young children to preschool programs has a positive impact on their cognitive, social and emotional development. Evidence shows clearly that early childhood education is highly equitable, especially when targeted particularly on disadvantaged children. This is especially the case for interventions that are very intensive, as has been shown in the United States in the Perry Preschool Project, or also the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child- Parent Program. Participating students achieve better test scores, lower grade retention and higher rate of high school graduation. The effects of having a good start also persist after graduation: research shows a long lasting effect of preschool education on income, family relationship and even health. The benefits for the student and also for the society as a whole are extremely high, and exceed the cost of such programs. Such programs of early childhood education have good cost-benefit ratios, in relation to learning gains and social outcomes (Caldero, 2007).

74.   Furthermore, it is more efficient for a country to invest in early childhood education than in any other educational stage: the positive return on investment in early childhood education is higher than in any other, and this return is even more important for the children from disadvantaged socio-economic background. In the same way, the lack of provision of early childhood education also leads to economic losses: efficiency is hindered by the fact that women may have to exit the active working population, and by the fact that the child could have benefited from a longer period of schooling. It seems that to focus on early childhood education allows serving both efficiency and equity goals: there is a great potential for countries in this area of policy orientation. Countries that lead early child education have lower levels of inequity in education, suggesting the effectiveness of early intervention policies in reducing inequity (OECD, 2009). These policies are worth further consideration and analysis.

75.   How to target resources? The majority of OECD countries have put into place mechanisms to direct extra resources to schools and/or to disadvantaged students. The effects of such measures are positive: it addresses the fairness dimension of equity, as it seeks to overcome the disadvantaging effects of social background and it also may discourage schools from "selecting out" children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

76.   Despite these mechanisms, questions still persist: how should resources be targeted, among different individuals or educational institutions? Indeed, equity may require resources to be distributed to different students or schools, according to their needs: more resources may need to be channelled to the children or schools that need them the most. But, how to channel these resources may depend on funding structures and policies. Either children are targeted based on the fact that they come from a disadvantaged background, or have lower educational performance, and are falling behind. It is often the case that those who come from disadvantaged socio-economic background are more likely of displaying learning weaknesses, and the extra support given to lower performers improves equity in education. However, what is questioned is what is the best approach to fund those who are disadvantaged. Should the focus be on individual support or by providing support to schools which often gather students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the French educational priority zones (*zones d'education prioritaire, ZEP*)?

77.   But, some precautions have to be taken in the targeting of these resources: not only the mechanisms put into place have to ensure that these resources are used to help/assist those who need it the most, but policymakers also have to take into account that to label certain schools as "disadvantaged" can be negative, as such a label can discourage both students and teachers. Indeed, the designation of a school as part of a priority zone may prompt parents to send their children elsewhere. Some countries (Australia, Denmark, Finland, Italy) prefer to refer to measures for the 'success' of students/schools rather than to try to reduce "failure" (Kovacs, 1998).

5. PROJECT OUTPUTS

78. This project is organized to make the most of the OECD's strengths-- providing a framework through which governments can compare experiences, seek responses to tackle common problems, and identify and share good practices. It also goes beyond by supporting national discussion and implementation of policies. The richness of OECD's international comparisons and its value is directly linked to the number of countries involved in an active way in the project. This is why we are seeking considerable country participation in this project.

79. The project has two strands of work: comparative analysis and individual national assessments. These two complementary strands are designed to ensure both comparative analysis on what are policies that are successful in reducing education failure and knowledge and exchange about how they are being implemented across different OECD and partner countries. The comparative work will provide a framework for analysis and the national assessments are geared to support national discussion and implementation. International conferences and workshops are designed to encourage exchange of country policies and practices and to present findings of the project. Figure 5 presents the structure of the project.

Figure 5. Structure of the OECD Project Overcoming School Failure: Policies That Work
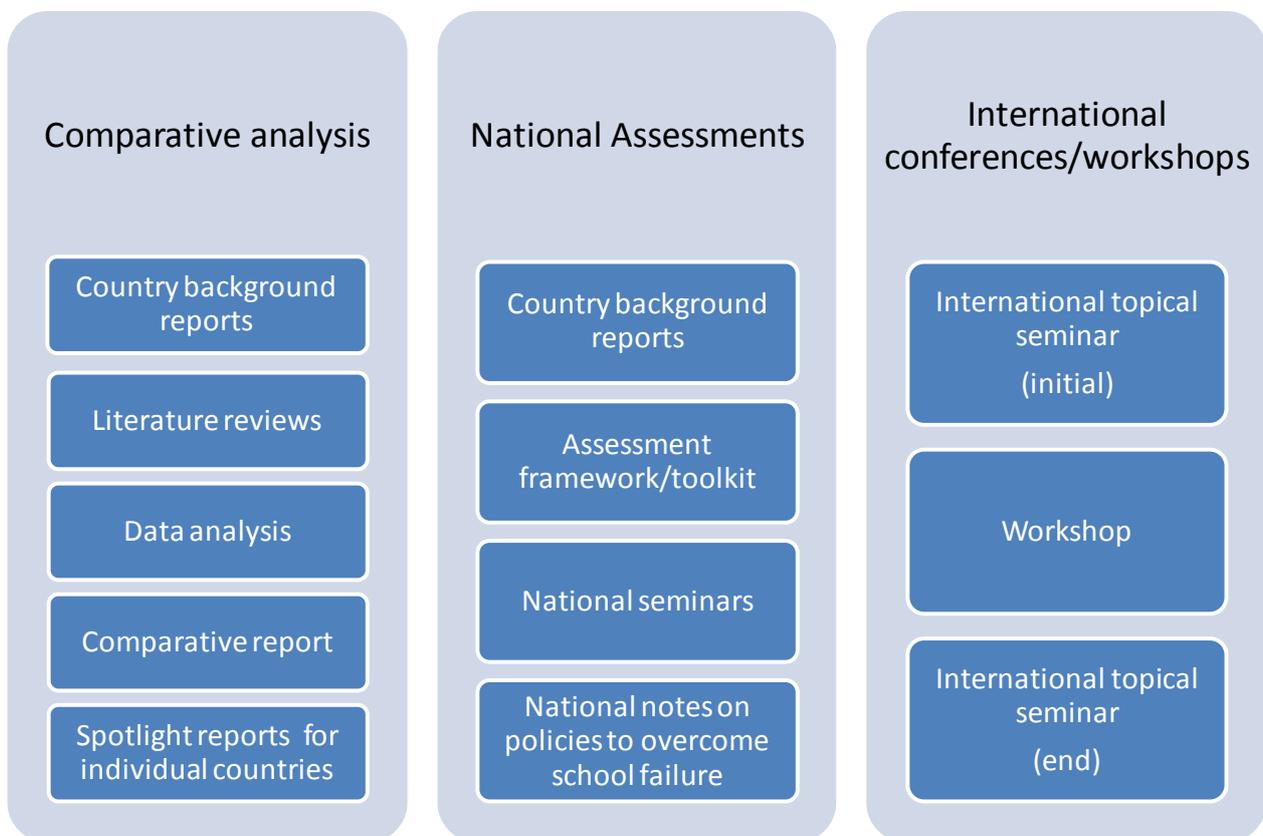
Comparative analytical strand

80.　　This strand will develop comparative analysis on the policy levers which can contribute to overcome school failure and reduce inequities. It will be based on participating country short background reports, data analysis and research and literature reviews on related policy areas, and will be updating the evidence, findings and implementation challenges presented in *No More failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. It will lead to the following outputs:

- **A comparative report**, proposing policy levers that have been successful in reducing education failure. This report will be updating *No More Failures: Ten steps to Equity in Education* by providing more up to date evidence and focusing on challenges in design and implementation for policies to overcome school failure.

- **Spotlight reports** will be prepared for the countries that contribute to the project. These will consist of customised summaries of the comparative report that combine the general findings of the comparative analytical strand, with highlights featuring the country under the spotlight (specific data and policy information).

- **Working papers** on specific topics related to equity and school failure, such as school choice, policies to reduce drop-out, in-school measures to prevent failure, or funding strategies to support low performing schools or students. The preparation of these papers will depend on availability of funding.

National assessment seminars

81.　　In addition to comparative analysis, countries may choose to have a national assessment seminar. National assessment seminars are intended to raise awareness and support national discussion on how to best promote education policy reforms geared to reduce school failure in an international comparative framework. As a result of each *National Assessment Seminar*, the OECD will develop a *Note on Progress in Reducing School Failure*.

82.　　Each national assessment seminar, organised in collaboration between the country and OECD, will bring together OECD, international experts and key country stakeholders to review policies adopted, progress made and remaining challenges to reduce school failure. It will follow the ten step framework (box 1) developed in *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education* to review progress in fairness in a) education design, b) practices and c) resources to reduce school failure.

83.　　However, country challenges vary according to context and to their different situations. Therefore, to support countries in the development of policies targeted to their specific needs, within the overall framework presented above, countries may choose in addition to focus on specific policy issues which are of key relevance to them. For example, the seminar may have a special focus on school choice, on the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary, or on possible linkages between vocational and academic tracks.

84.　　To provide support for the seminar and in general for participating countries, the OECD will develop an *OECD assessment framework or toolkit*, useful for countries to think about what kind of practice/policy/intervention might be the most effective for a particular country or/and for a particular school configuration.

85.   The steps to organise the national assessment seminar are as follows:

- The country will prepare the country background report, based on the OECD outline;

- OECD and the National Co-ordinator will engage in preparatory discussions to define the specific country issues and the dates and process of organisation of the seminar. OECD will provide the guidelines;

- OECD will frame the country's policies and practices within the context of the empirical evidence and data analysis gathered through the comparative analytical strand and using the OECD assessment framework/toolkit;

- The OECD will select 2 or 3 international experts who can provide the appropriate comparative framework to contribute to the seminar;

- The OECD and international experts will travel to the country two days before the seminar to have a one-day visit and meetings with policy makers and practitioners to study the country's relevant policies and practices.

- A one to two day national assessment seminar will bring together key players to discuss policies and practices to reduce school failure. OECD will provide the analytical framework, international and national experts will present and discuss key issues, and there will be round table discussions and conclusions from the event. As a result of the discussions, the OECD and international experts will prepare a *National note on policies to overcome school failure* to be presented to the country after the seminar.

86.   This strand of the project will lead to a range of outputs:

- An **OECD assessment toolkit will be designed as a tool for countries** to reflect on what kind of practice/policy/interventions have been taken at a national level and on what their priorities may be in the future.

- The **national assessment seminar** which will lead to discussions, awareness raising, and conclusions to move the agenda forward among key stakeholders in the country.

- A **national note on policies to overcome school failure** will be prepared for the country. In a comparative framework, it will provide an overview of the country's situation, followed by a review of progress made and with conclusions based on the discussions and key issues agreed during the national assessment seminar.

87.   The originality and innovation of this project is that it is both comparative and selective, allowing for individual countries who want specific focus to have more in-depth review within a broader comparative perspective. This comparative perspective will provide an analysis of the types of challenges countries have faced and an overview of the different policies and strategies adopted across OECD countries that target equity in education policies. At the same time, the project allows for further focus. Interested countries can have a targeted national assessment seminar, where they can choose the specific issue they are interested in. During the seminar, organized in the country, the precise situation of the country will be examined, through a combination of national and international expertise, drawing on the OECD knowledge and experience in such themes. The strong point of this output is that it allows the different stakeholders to share experiences, in a defined context.

88. Finally, the series of policy outputs that will be produced by this activity will add value to the existing literature on the subject, since it combines an international scope of the issues (broad view of the problem), and at the same time, an in-depth analysis of specific targeted issues.

6. PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES ROLE AND TASKS

89.   Participating countries will engage in cooperation with the OECD team to develop the country questionnaire and to organize the national assessment seminar. The country will propose a National Co-ordinator as the key liaison with the OECD and a National Advisory Committee to provide input and feedback to the National Co-ordinator.

Role of the OECD National Co-ordinator

90.   National authorities are responsible for the preparation of the background report. Each country taking part in the Project must appoint a National Co-ordinator. The responsibilities of the National Co-ordinator include:

- Communications with the OECD Secretariat about the Project;

- Communications within the country about the Project;

- Managing the preparation of the country background report;

- Ensuring that the country background report is completed on schedule;

- Liaising with the OECD Secretariat and organization of the national assessment seminar (for those countries participating in the national assessment strand);

- Attending international meetings and workshops associated with the Project;

- Co-ordinating country feedback on draft materials produced through the Project; and

- Assisting with dissemination activities associated with the Project.

91.   The National Co-ordinator will normally be appointed from within the national Ministry of Education, and will preferably be an official with close involvement in related policy areas. It is estimated that the National Co-ordinator's role will involve a minimum of 20 working days per year, with perhaps an additional 10-20 days involved with organising the national assessment seminar, for those who participate in the strand.

National Advisory Committee

92.   Countries might find it suitable to establish a National Advisory Committee to support the work of the National Co-ordinator, oversee the preparation of the Country Short Background Report (hereafter Country Report), to organise the national assessment seminar if the country opts for it, and assist and guide in the project more generally. This will contribute to greater country engagement in the project, in the organization of the national seminar and in the dissemination of findings and reports.

93.   This Committee can be a way to ensure cooperation between all relevant Ministries and agencies, as well as the involvement of key stakeholder groups, given that normally, no single organisation, Ministry or group will have all of the information required to complete the Country Report. National Co-ordinators can ensure co-operation through the National Advisory Committees by including, in addition to the Ministry of Education, stakeholders such as: local authorities responsible for education policy; principals' and vice-principals' associations; teacher trade unions; other teacher professional organisations; researchers; parents' organisations; and students' associations.

94.   This committee can play an important role in ensuring that a variety of perspectives are reflected in the Country Report and in the seminar. Where a country decides not to establish a National Advisory Committee there will need to be other processes for ensuring that the report adequately reflects the views and perspectives of the different stakeholder groups concerned. A key task of National Co-ordinators will be to consolidate these different perspectives in order to provide the OECD Secretariat with a single, integrated response. The methodology used to ensure the involvement of different bodies in the preparation of the report should be noted in the report itself.

Country Short Background Report

95.   Each participating country will prepare a Country Short Background Report. The report aims to provide information on the design and implementation of policies to overcome school failure. The Country Report is divided into two sections. Section I is intended to provide a succinct analysis of the context, key factors, current policy and challenges in individual countries. In Section II, countries are asked to respond to a questionnaire, to provide an overview of recent policy developments in accordance with the Ten Steps set forth in *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. Each measure/development is to be analysed from an implementation point of view. The detailed outline of the report is provided in Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work: Country short Background report guidelines (EDU/EDPC(2010)2).

96.   The Country Report targets four main audiences:

- The OECD Secretariat and other countries participating in the project as a means of sharing experiences and providing input for the final comparative report;

- Stakeholders within the country concerned; the Country Report can be an important means of focusing national attention on key issues that need to be addressed and drawing attention to policy initiatives;

- All those interested in equity in education at the international level as all Country Reports will be published on the OECD website – with prior country authorization -- and therefore widely disseminated.

- For countries who sign up for a national assessment seminar, the Country Report will be of central importance in identifying key issues that should be explored during the national seminar, the specific policies that should be examined, the institutions that should be visited and the persons that should be consulted.

97.   The national authority responsible for a country's participation in the Project may decide to write the Country Background Report itself, or it may decide to commission a research organization, a consultant or a group of consultants to write it on its behalf. Whichever decision is taken, the National Co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring that the Country Report is completed on time and that it follows the guidelines and outline developed by the OECD Secretariat.

7. PROJECT CALENDAR

Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work **project calendar**

	Comparative Analysis	National Assessments	Communications
Dec-09	Project proposal	Project proposal	
2010	**2010**		
Jan-10	Draft Background Report Outline	Draft Background Report Outline	First international Workshop
Feb-10			
Mar-10	Background report outline to participating countries	Background report outline to participating countries	
Apr-10	Literature review		
May-10		Assessment framework/toolkit	
Jun-10	Data analysis	National assessment country X	
Jul-10			
Aug-10			
Sep-10			
Oct-10		National assessment country X	
Nov-10			International Workshop
Dec-10	Country background reports finished		
2011	**2011**		
Jan-11	Begin comparative report		
Feb-11			
Mar-11		National assessment country X	
Apr-11			
May-11			
Jun-11	Comparative report draft	National assessment country X	International Workshop
Jul-11			
Aug-11			
Sept -11			
Oct-11			
Nov -11	Publication		Publication

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