

Title: *Social Segregation in Schools: An International Comparison*

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The extent of social segregation in schools – the uneven distribution of children from different social groups across schools – has attracted considerable attention in recent years. For example, there have been concerns in some countries that the degree of social segregation has risen due to quasi-market reforms of education. The growing literature on peer group effects on learning also stimulates interest in segregation in schools. But no cross-national evidence has existed on social segregation that would allow the level in any one country to be benchmarked with that elsewhere.

This paper is the first to compare systematically the extent of social segregation in schools across OECD countries. Various measures of social background are used in order to test whether conclusions about cross-national differences are robust to the choice of definition of social group to which a child belongs. Special attention is paid to two issues. The first is sampling variation (and hence statistical inference) and bias that stem from the use of survey data to calculate segregation measures. The second is the decomposition of differences in segregation across countries by various characteristics of schools (e.g. public or private status, whether schools select pupils on merit or not, and urban/rural location).

The analysis is based on the 2000 and 2003 rounds of the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) which provides comparable data on samples of schools and children across 27 OECD countries.