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Equality in the public Hessian school system: a quantitative analysis of the state resource allocation to primary schools based on per learner unit costs

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Abstract

Equal learning conditions are enshrined in German Basic Law. As a consequence of the federal structure of Germany the 16 states are responsible for educational concerns and have different resource allocation systems. Even within states the distribution of resources varies because of the involvement of regional education offices.

This study determines the equality of the resource allocation system for the state of Hesse regarding pure primary schools. The innovative aspect of this study is the use of real cost data at the school level provided by the new Hessian accounting and human capital management system.

Per learner unit costs are the basis for the analyses and the main focus of the study. Correlations between unit costs and school variables (school size, urbanisation, gender, migration, special needs, class size, social status and learner results) are also examined.

The findings highlight that the dissemination of resources in Hesse is not equitable on the basis of per learner unit costs. The resources at the school level vary for example by district and schools size.

The analyses of the correlations between unit costs and school variables show a resource disadvantage to schools in mostly urban districts and with a higher proportion of learners with a migration background. The scrutiny of correlations between the school variables points out that the social status of a school and the learner achievement have a strong negative correlation with the proportion of learners with a migration background.

The study recommends a change of the resource allocation in Hesse from the current "reference classes" to per learner unit costs with a consideration of the social status of a school as well as improvements in the school structure (e.g. merging small schools in rural areas) in cooperation with the districts. Further research for other types of schools is necessary because the focus of this study is on pure primary schools. In addition the cost assignment of the accounting system for schools should be improved to get a better data quality for further cost analyses.