
Educational Inequality in Israel

From Research to Policy

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Foreword

“It turns out that advancing equal opportunity and economic empowerment is both morally right and good economics, because discrimination, poverty and ignorance restrict growth, while investments in education, infrastructure and scientific and technological research increase it, creating more good jobs and new wealth for all of us.”

William J. Clinton

“There’s no reason why children in inner cities or rural areas do not receive the same quality education or opportunities as those in suburbs or wealthy neighborhoods. If we truly believe in giving all citizens a chance to pursue happiness and pursue their goals, then we cannot continue to marginalize entire groups of people.”

Al Sharpton

Education at its best is one of the keys to a better future. The investments we make in our children are among the most valuable investments that can be made, both for them, setting the stage for their growth — personal, social, communal, and economic — and for the improvement of society as a whole, increasing harmony, justice, well-being, and economic growth. A quality education is about much more than information; it develops the ability to reason, to learn from debate and constructive criticism, to hear and understand diverse opinions, to form and articulate educated opinions, and to interact with peers. Because of this, education at its best is a great enabler of social mobility, arming young men and women from weak socioeconomic backgrounds with the ability to leapfrog over their peers into a more financially stable life.

In practice, unfortunately, the lofty ideals of education systems are not always attained. Children raised in affluent families by educated parents often enjoy an advantage in the educational attainment process. In addition, gaps exist in the quality of education available to the different strata of society, and there are signs that these gaps are particularly large in Israel; that there are extra barriers that hinder or even block intelligent, motivated, and able pupils from “the wrong sort of background.” This is a systemic failure. It is detrimental not only to those not given the chance to excel, but to society as a whole; economic growth will be hindered by the failure of a country to realize the human capital potential of its population.

This path breaking book you are holding, authored by four of the leading education scholars in Israel, is only tangentially about differences in scholastic attainments across students — ex-post inequalities in achievements — although these are, at times, indicative of the underlying problem. It is mainly about ex-ante systematic inequalities in educational opportunities available to the different populations in Israel. It carefully maps out these differences and their sources, considers the consequences, and offers options for rectifying the situation. As such, the authors pave the way for policy makers to identify the changes necessary to allow students from all social strata the chance to reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow if they apply themselves, which, in turn, can lead to less economic inequality, greater socioeconomic mobility, and an increase in the prosperity and well-being in the country.

May you learn from this book as much as I did.

Avi Weiss

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