

How school report grades affect pupils' life decision

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Summary

- Every year around 14 % of pupils in the fifth grade of primary school apply for places at eight-year gymnasium. More girls than boys apply for places by 53 percent, and more girls than boys are accepted by 53%. The gender imbalance in applications and places awarded is even greater at the later points of transition to gymnasium (academic track secondary schools) for its six-year and four-year formats. This study only looks at the transition to eight-year format.
- Girls are on average awarded better grades on their school reports than boys who achieve identical test results. This is apparently because teachers award grades based not only on cognitive skills and knowledge but also on the pupils' socio-emotional abilities, in which boys tend to be worse off. The criteria for admission to eight-year gymnasium are based primarily on the results of admissions and in part on the applicant's average grade on their most recent half-yearly school report. Pupils' decisions about whether to apply to gymnasium are primarily determined by their school report grades, in particular whether they have achieved the top grade "1", rather than by their expectations about their admissions test results.
- Our analysis reveals that gender imbalance among applicants to eight-year gymnasium persists even when we compare groups of boys and girls with identical chances of admission. The imbalance is most marked in the group of pupils with borderline chances of admission. A much larger proportion of boys than of girls in this group achieved grades lower than "1" on their reports in one or both of the key subjects – mathematics and Czech language.
- Pupils' and parents' inaccurate assumptions about pupils' cognitive skills based on their report grades can distort pupils' further educational ambitions, lead them to make inappropriate decisions about further schooling and thus substantially influence their educational pathways, careers and life stories.
- Report grades provide particularly imperfect information about pupils' abilities due to their extremely limited comparability: grades are awarded differently at different schools and by different teachers (whose subjective views they reflect), and the weight given to pupils' socio-emotional skills within the grade is unclear.

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