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The equity consequences of school-based management

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which the introduction of school-based management (SBM) affects schools' incomes and educational equity?

Design/methodology/approach – An analysis of financial reports coming from 31 SBM schools during a period of four sequential years reveals that the overall inequity among schools has slightly decreased, although significant differences are found between high and low socio-economic schools.

Findings – The findings show that significant differences exist between schools of low and high socio-economic backgrounds in the relative amount of incomes coming from parental payments. An analysis of the income provided to schools by the LEA suggests that the differences and inequalities between schools are moderated by the LEA, which provides relatively more funds to schools of low socio-economic backgrounds following the introduction of SBM in schools.

Originality/value – The study points to the danger inherent in SBM for educational equity and highlights the significance of a compensating formula that will take into account mainly parental payments *de facto* in previous years.

Keywords Equity capital, Income, Educational administration, Israel

Paper type Case study

Background

What is the effect of the financial autonomy granted to schools through the introduction of school based management (SBM) on income equity among schools of different socio-economic backgrounds? Although SBM has become a central theme of the restructuring efforts in many western centralized educational systems (Devos *et al.*, 1998; Robertson *et al.*, 1995), little is known about its direct effects on educational equity in terms of the financial resources that schools manage to generate. By employing a longitudinal research design, the following study, which focuses on the Israeli educational system, analyzes the annual financial reports of schools, attempting to determine whether SBM implemented in a centralized system, as a top-down restructuring initiative is beneficial for educational equity.

School-based management and equity
SBM has become in recent years a major change initiative implemented in a large number of educational systems around the world (Sackney and Dibski, 1994). It

suggests delegating authority from the central authority to schools within a centrally coordinated framework (Boyd, 1990, p. 90), in order to increase schools' control over the educational processes they conduct (Clune and White, 1988) and the correspondence of these processes to local needs (Chubb and Moe, 1988; Fusarelli and Scribner, 1993, p. 1; Wohlstetter *et al.*, 1994). SBM is based on an assumption that schools' relevancy for pupils will increase when they are able to control their budget and personnel and to plan their educational agenda in accordance with local needs presented by parents, students and people of the local community (David, 1989). Therefore, it is believed that SBM is influential for school effectiveness (Brown, 1991, 1992).

To enable school autonomy to develop, SBM suggests broadening autonomy in a number of areas likely to shape their organizational behavior. These include school flexibility in determining their curriculum and educational agenda, principal authority regarding personnel, parental involvement in the administration of school and school financial autonomy, which is likely to increase through direct transfer of governmental budgets to schools and by allowing schools to obtain financial resources from private self-generated sources.

However, not surprisingly, this proposed change provokes controversy between those who view SBM as a catalyst for improving school pedagogical performance and effectiveness (Caldwell, 2003; Hadderman, 1999), their efficiency in using resources (World Bank, 1988, p. 10) and teacher motivation and accountability (Burke, 1992; Duttweiler and Mutchler, 1990; Reyes and Liable, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1990), and those opposing, who see in SBM a threat for educational equity because of its assumed negative consequences for the social gaps among pupils of different socio-economic backgrounds (Le Grand, 1991). According to this point of view, SBM may negatively affect equity in two major forms: horizontally, since school budgeting is based on the number of pupils who study in each school. Therefore, bigger schools' budgets are likely to increase while smaller schools' budgets are likely to decrease (Marren and Levacic, 1992), and may in turn negatively affect their pedagogical conduct (Levacic, 1992; Thomas and Bullock, 1992). This view is empirically supported by research findings showing that such a budgeting pattern encourages schools to cut their expenses to a minimum rather than improve the quality of the pedagogical processes they conduct (Levacic and Marren, 1992).

Granting schools permission to gain resources independently may also negatively affect the vertical equity among schools in considering the differences in their assumed ability to obtain resources from self-generated sources (Rubenstein, 1998).

These assumed consequences become a major concern for policy makers around the world (Rossmiller, 1994) who were encouraged to adopt a differentiating resource allocation formula (Levacic, 1992; Rubenstein, 1998) that will provide schools financial resources according to the socio-economic background of children (Vollansky, 1994). However, although such conduct may decrease to some extent inequalities caused by SBM, it does not necessarily compensate smaller schools or decrease income differences among schools obtained from parents as well as other self-generated sources.

SBM in the Israeli educational system
The ethos of educational equity (i.e. freedom from bias or favoritism) and that of equality (i.e. sameness) have become major values for educational policy planning and implementation since Israel became independent in 1948. These were also among the

main catalysts for the high degree of central control that characterized the Israeli educational system, in an attempt to ensure maximum equity for pupils of different socio-economic backgrounds within the educational system.

In the last couple of decades, however, the Israeli educational system has decentralized rather than centralized its control patterns. This reform was initiated by the Ministry of Education for two main reasons: first, central officials turned to decentralization as a last resort after realizing that all the other control mechanisms had failed (Gaziel and Romm, 1988). Second, educators in Israel have long recognized the negative pedagogical effect of strong centralization, curriculum uniformity and the fragmented nature of the system (Vollansky and Bar-Elli, 1995).

Hence, based on the recommendations of a steering committee appointed by the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture (1993), SBM has gradually been introduced in all Israeli elementary schools. This decision followed past initiatives that failed to decentralize the Israeli educational system and increase school autonomy, mainly because of the contradicting tendencies to delegate authority to schools and, at the same time, to maintain substantial central control in schools (Nir, 2003a, b). This seems to be also the case of SBM in considering for example that schools are granted financial autonomy yet, at the same time, the management of teachers' and principals' salaries remains in the hands of the central authority.

Since its implementation, the assumed threat of SBM to educational equity has become a prominent issue shaping the agenda of protest groups that strive for social justice in the Israeli social milieu. SBM raises such concerns especially in light of the compulsory and free education law constituted in order to ensure equal educational opportunities for all. However, there exists relatively little empirical evidence that may account for the connection between expanding school financial autonomy and the implications for the educational system and school conduct (Murphy and Beck, 1995, p. 151). Most existing evidence discusses the amount of savings related to building maintenance (Simkins, 1994; Knight, 1993, p.132; Brown, 1990) or issues of efficiency in the use of resources (Knight, 1993, p. 132) rather than to the amount of resources that schools of different socio-economic backgrounds succeed to generate following the introduction of SBM.

Therefore, this study proposes to assess to what extent the introduction of SBM in schools affects financial resources and the equity among schools. It focuses in particular on three questions:

(1) Does equity among schools change over time following the introduction of SBM?

(2) Is there a change in the amount of schools' self-generated incomes following the implementation of SBM?

(3) Do schools of different socio-economic backgrounds differ in the amount of financial resources they obtain following the implementation of SBM?

Method
Sample
The study is based on a sample of 31 Israeli elementary schools of different social-economic backgrounds. These schools have officially implemented SBM in 1998, but received financial autonomy only a year later, after their principals participated in

a one-year training program initiated and carried out by the Ministry of Education. Although our initial preference was to survey schools located at different LEAs comprising the Israeli educational, the study was eventually based on a sample of schools located in a single LEA. This was done for several reasons: First, this LEA was the first to introduce SBM and therefore, the only LEA in which a longitudinal design essential to assess the consequences of SBM for equity among schools was made possible. Second, the large variance among schools' socio-economic background within this particular LEA enabled to evaluate the influences of SBM on schools of different backgrounds by using schools as the unit of analysis. And finally, the sample of schools was taken from a single LEA to avoid biases and invalid comparisons that are likely to result from the different financing and bookkeeping procedures characterizing various LEAs.

Database
Although schools are autonomous in managing their budgets, they still need to keep records and submit an annual financial report. Hence, the following study analyzes the annual financial reports of 31 schools during a period of four years (1999-2002), making a total of 124 annual reports approved by the LEA's accountant that are used in this study. It is important to note however, that these financial reports refer only to funds that SBM schools control and are allowed to use for according to their local agenda. These funds make on average about 20 per cent of the total public expenditure on the schooling system since the Israeli Ministry of Education under SBM continues to centrally control the budget and most educational expanses (see Table I).

Analyses
The analyses are conducted in three sequential phases: to assess the implications of the introduction SBM in the Israeli educational system for inequity among schools, a *Gini* Coefficient is used as a measure for appraising income inequity (Chakravarty, 1990, p. 82). This measure is computed as a proportion of the full distribution of incomes relative to the mean income. The basic *Gini* formula used here with N factors, classified from poorer to richer, is:

$$Gini \sum_{i=1}^{N} 2(X_i - Y_i)\Delta X_i$$

Schools' socio-economic background	Low $N = 7$	Medium $N = 15$	High $N = 9$
Mean and SES[a] score	7 (SD = 1.0)	3.6 (SD = 2.37)	1.56 (SD = 0.527)
Mean number of children	278	340	401
Mean number of classrooms	12	13	15
Mean annual school incomes (in thousands NIS[b])	445	642	920

Notes: [a] SES grades range between 1 for high and 10 for low socio-economic schools
[b] NIS = New Israeli Shekels

Table I.
Schools' background data

$X_i/1 = N$

Y_i = the accumulative per cent of income per unit

$\Delta X_i = X_{i-1} - X_i$

The *Gini* Coefficient ranges between 0, which reflects total equity (when everyone has the same income), and 1, which reflects total inequity (when a certain individual receives all the incomes while the others receive none at all).

In the second phase, the incomes that schools generate from various sources are analyzed in order to determine which of these sources most contributes to the inequity among schools. In particular, the analysis focuses on incomes from self-generated sources and from parents' payments. The final phase of the analysis attempts to assess to what extent schools characterized by different socio-economic backgrounds differ in their self-generated incomes and what is the effect of the resource allocation formula employed by the LEA for the inequity among schools.

To control for school size in the analyses, schools serve as the unit of analysis and all measures are calculated as income per pupil (i.e. the sum total of school income divided by the number of pupils who study in the school in a given year). To enable a comparison of incomes in four successive years, inflation is controlled and all incomes are computed based on the price level of December 2002.

Findings

A *Gini* Coefficient computed to measure income inequity shows that the overall inequity among the schools in the sample has slightly decreased over the years (see Table II).

The analysis indicates that inequity among schools slightly decreased, from 19.4 per cent in 1999 to 16.3 per cent in 2002. A closer look at the various income components that are used in the analysis reveals that incomes coming from parents (in Israel, an annual sum of money for enrichment activities) and from self-generated sources are the main contributing sources for the inequity among schools: Parental payments contribute about 28 per cent on average whereas incomes from self-generated sources contribute on average 70 per cent to the total inequity among schools. However, as Table III shows, these two incomes differ in terms of their relative share in the schools' budget:

It is evident that the relative share of income coming from parental payments in four years is 47.5 per cent on average of the total school income ($N = 31$) which may be

Source of income	1999	2000	2001	2002
The *Gini* Coefficient for the total incomes	0.1942	0.1507	0.1699	0.1613
The *Gini* Coefficient for incomes from the LEA[a]	0.1186	0.0971	0.1083	0.1299
The *Gini* Coefficient for incomes from parents	0.2954	0.2552	0.2999	0.2893
The *Gini* Coefficient for incomes from self-generated sources	0.6991	0.8000	0.6695	0.6680

Table II.
The *Gini* Coefficient following the introduction of SBM in schools

Notes: [a] Incomes from the LEA include also incomes from the Ministry of Education and Culture ($n = 31$); The *Gini* Coefficient ranges between 0 and 1 where 0 reflects total equity among schools

Source of income by year	High socio-economic schools (n = 9)		Low socio-economic schools (n = 7)		Total schools (n = 31)	
	Per cent	NIS[a]	Per cent	NIS	Per cent	NIS
Year 2002						
Incomes from the LEA	39.1	909	57.2	974	43.9	908
Incomes from parents	55.9	1,298	34.8	593	48.6	1,002
Incomes from self-generated sources	5	116	8	137	7.5	154
Total incomes	100	2,323	100	1,438	100	2,070
Year 2001						
Incomes from the LEA	41.6	972	63.5	1,079	48.2	962
Incomes from parents	51.5	1,203	32.5	552	47.5	948
Incomes from self-generated sources	6.9	160	4	68	4.3	87
Total incomes	100.0	2,335	100.0	1,338	100.0	2,006
Year 2000						
Incomes from the LEA	44.3	965	65.1	1,039	50.4	951
Incomes from parents	48.6	1,060	30.3	484	43.3	817
Incomes from self-generated sources	7.1	154	4.6	73	6.3	116
Total incomes	100.0	2,179	100.0	1,596	100.0	1,896
Year 1999						
Incomes from the LEA	40.7	913	57	856	42.3	825
Incomes from parents	52.7	1,180	38.6	580	50.6	987
Incomes from self-generated sources	6.6	148	4.4	66	7.1	138
Total incomes	100.0	2,241	100.0	1,502	100.0	1,951

Notes: [a] NIS = New Israeli Shekels

Table III.
Distribution of incomes
(per pupil) by source
(n = 31): comparing
schools of high and low
socio-economic
backgrounds

rather surprising considering that public education in Israel is free by low. Conversely, it is evident that school income from self-generated sources comprises on average only 6.3 per cent of their total income. This last finding reflects that contrary to the theoretical assumption inherent in SBM, the increase in schools' financial autonomy did not significantly change school conduct in terms of self-generated resources or enhance significantly the share of self-generated income of the total school income.

This is also evident when self-generated incomes are compared between schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds. A comparison of incomes between these two groups of schools between 1999 and 2002 reveals that incomes from self-generated sources in schools of low socio-economic backgrounds increased from 4.4 per cent in 1999 of the total income to 8.8 per cent in 2002 and in schools of high socio-economic backgrounds, decreased from 6.6 per cent in 1999 to 5.0 per cent in 2002 of the total income. These figures indicate that the share of incomes from self-generated sources of the total school income is in general low, and that no statistically significant differences are found between schools of different socio-economic backgrounds regarding self-generated incomes that schools manage to obtain. Hence, although the *Gini* Coefficient indicates that the biggest differences among schools are found when self-generated sources are considered, the relatively small amount of income coming from these sources of the total school budget allows the conclusion that these incomes

change little in schools' financial status and are therefore less significant in creating income gaps among schools.

However, the differences between schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds are more strongly evident when parental payments are considered.

It is evident that schools of high socio-economic backgrounds generate parental payments about two times more than do schools of low socio-economic backgrounds both in 1999 [$F(1, 14) = 5.11; p < 0.05$] and in 2002 [$F(1, 14) = 5.39; p < 0.05$]. Over a period of four years, an average of 52 per cent of the total school income was generated by schools of high socio-economic backgrounds from parental payments whereas only 34 per cent of the total income was generated from parental payments by schools of low socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the figures show that during this period of time, schools of high socio-economic backgrounds increased their incomes from parental payments by 10 per cent, whereas schools of low socio-economic backgrounds increased their incomes by only 2.2 per cent.

How then can the *Gini* Coefficient indicating an overall decrease in the inequity among schools of different socio-economic backgrounds be explained? The answer lays in the LEA's financial conduct (see Table IV and Figures 1 and 2).

While, in 1999, schools of high socio-economic backgrounds received relatively more funding from the LEA than did schools of low socio-economic backgrounds, it is evident that this tendency has been replaced since 2000 by the opposite, which favors schools of low socio-economic backgrounds. It is evident that while the average income from the LEA remained unchanged over a period of four years in schools of high socio-economic backgrounds, incomes coming from the LEA have increased by 13.7 per cent in schools of low socio-economic backgrounds, mainly through additional incomes that the LEA allocated to these schools. In considering that the incomes from the LEA make on average about 46 per cent of schools' total income, this shift seems to

Year	High socio-economic schools ($n = 9$)	Low socio-economic schools ($n = 7$)
1999		
Basic income	895	824
Additional income	18	32
Total	913	856
2000		
Basic income	870	907
Additional income	95	132
Total	965	1,039
2001		
Basic income	901	781
Additional income	71	298
Total	972	1,079
2002		
Basic income	871	882
Additional income	38	92
Total	909	974
Total change 1999-2002 (%)	0	13.7

Table IV.
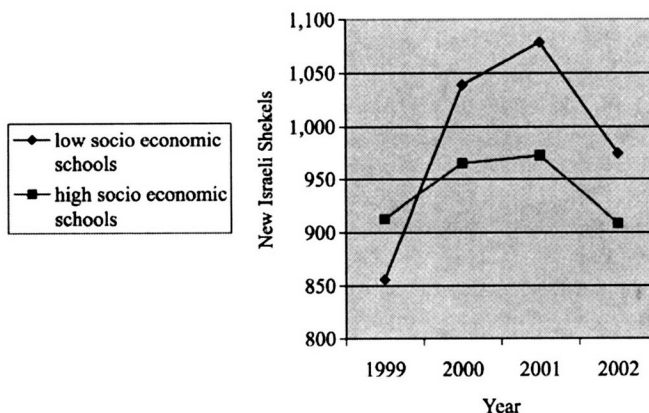Incomes from the LEA by schools' socio-economic background (per pupil)

provide compensation for the differences between schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds and may be the reason for the overall decrease in the inequity found among schools. In considering that the basic income per pupil is a fixed sum of money for all schools regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, it may be understood why the LEA is using additional incomes, which are rather "soft budgets", as means for decreasing the gaps among schools of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of SBM on the inequity among schools in terms of schools' income. Based on the *Gini* Coefficient obtained for the 31 schools that were studied over a period of four years, it is evident that the inequity among schools has slightly decreased. However, this decrease is hardly influenced by schools' financial initiatives since schools, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, have failed to create new self-generated financial resources over the years to an extent that could significantly increase their annual budget. Also, the decreased inequity may not be attributed to parental payments since in spite of the free education law, parents' payments are a main financial source and a central factor in creating inequity among schools, ranging on average between 30 per cent to 50 per cent of the total school income in schools of different socio-economic backgrounds.
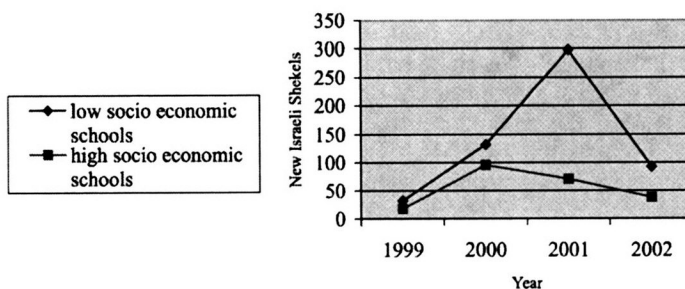
Figure 1.
Additional income (per pupil) from the LEA: comparing schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds

Figure 2.
Total income (per pupil) from the LEA: comparing schools of high and low socio-economic backgrounds

Rather, the decreased inequity in schools' incomes seems to be a result of the change in the LEA's conduct regarding resource allocation to schools, which grants schools of low socio-economic backgrounds a larger budget in comparison to the budget allotted to schools of high socio-economic backgrounds. This is achieved through additional incomes, which vary significantly between schools of different backgrounds. Therefore, although it is difficult to establish firm generalizations based on data coming from a single LEA, it may be concluded that the centrally oriented intervention of the LEA studied in resource allocation to schools is the main contributing factor for the decrease in income inequalities among schools.

This interpretation gains additional support considering that the inequity among the schools that were studied was rather moderate from the beginning. The 19.4 per cent *Gini* Coefficient obtained in 1999 (which was the first year of schools' financial autonomy) may be the outcome of centralized efforts devoted for many years to ensure equity in the Israeli educational system, which may be evident in the compensating formula employed that differentially allocates financial resources to schools.

Hence, although schools need more than money in order to ensure equity, money is essential (Porter, 1994). Our findings point at the potential danger inherent for equity in SBM when introduced in an educational system comprised of schools of various socio-economic backgrounds if a compensating formula is not employed. Moreover, the findings suggest that a compensating formula may prove to be mostly effective in decreasing income inequalities among schools if it is computed based on the amount of payments that parents pay to school de facto rather than just on the socio-economic characteristics of the social community that school serves. This statement may be explained in considering the share of parental payments of the total school income is the main contributing factor for the income inequity among schools. Therefore, changing the compensating formula in this direction seems essential, if SBM is expected to promote the learning opportunities for all children rather than to widen social gaps and increase inequity among schools.

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