

Improving Equality of Opportunity at School Entry: Primary Education Enrollment in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In most countries, the default policy enrolls children in primary education based on annual birthday cutoffs. In the Netherlands, the education inspectorate discourages using birthday cutoffs and instead asks schools to enroll children based on their developmental skills. Compared with a birthday-cutoff policy with the same average age at entry into primary education, the Dutch policy (i) reduces differences in primary and secondary education outcomes across birth dates and (ii) compresses the distribution of end-of-primary-education skills by raising skills at the bottom and lowering them at the top. As Dutch schools still put some weight on birthday cutoffs, we analyze the consequences of primary education enrollment based `\textit{solely}` on developmental skills. This would nearly eliminate differences in primary and secondary education outcomes across birth dates and further compress the distribution of end-of-primary-education skills.

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