School-based decision-making has positive effects on education outcomes – but not in low-income countries

Decentralizing decision-making to schools has small to moderate positive effects in reducing repetition, dropouts and increasing test scores. These effects are restricted to middle-income countries, with no positive effects found in low-income countries or in disadvantaged communities.

What did the review study?
Many governments have addressed the low quality of education by devolving decision-making authority to schools. It is assumed that locating decision-making authority within schools will increase accountability, efficiency and responsiveness to local needs.

But there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of these reforms, especially from low-income countries. Existing reviews on school-based decision-making have tended to focus on proximal outcomes and offer very little information about why school-based decision-making has positive or negative effects in different circumstances.

This review addresses two questions: (1) What is the impact of school-based decision-making on educational outcomes in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs); and (2) What are the barriers to, and enablers of, effective models of school-based decision-making?

What studies are included?
Included studies for the analysis of impact evaluated the change in decision-making authority from a higher level of decision-making authority to the level of the school on educational outcomes. Outcomes were either proximal - e.g. attrition, equality of access, increased enrolment - or final - e.g. test scores, psychosocial and non-cognitive skills. Included studies had to have a comparison group and data which were collected since 1990.

Twenty-six studies, covering 17 interventions,
How up-to-date is this review?
The review authors searched for studies published until January 2015. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in November 2016.

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About this summary
This summary was prepared by Howard White (Campbell Collaboration), based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2016:XX “The effects of school-based decision making on educational outcomes in low and middle income contexts: a systematic review” by Roy Carr-Hill, Caine Rolleston, Rebecca Schendel, with Tejendra Pherali, Edwina Peart and Emma Jones (DOI: 10.4073/csr.20.x). The summary was designed, edited and produced by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.