



School autonomy: Yes? No?...

OECD

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This presentation

- The take-away point:
 - Autonomy is giving the schools the power to decide on the *management* (e.g. allocation of financial, educational and human resources) and/or the *educational project* of the school (e.g. objectives, curriculum and assessment)
 - It is *not*, in and of itself, a source for better student outcomes or greater efficiency in the educational system
 - It is successful in some contexts and countries but not in others
 - For it to be successful it assumes
 - Clear objectives that schools ought to achieve
 - Capacity at the school level for good decisions to be made and implemented
 - Successful reforms of autonomy should consider the organisational context more broadly to avoid unintended consequences and ensure success



This presentation

- School autonomy, ...
 - What we (OECD) understand by school autonomy
 - Countries' levels of school autonomy
- ...student learning outcomes...
 - Where and when does it work?
- ... and how should we talk about autonomy in the school system.



What is school autonomy?

- Most of the workings of a school (educational project, resources, management, selection of students, curriculum, evaluation, etc.) are the subject of *decisions*.
- *Who* makes those decisions?
 - Central, federal or state education agencies (Ministry)
 - District level agencies
 - The schools themselves (the principal, teachers, board of education but also parents and also students)
- Autonomy is when it is *the school* who is given the power to make these decisions
 - We can't talk about autonomy as a single attribute, but autonomy at different levels of the management process (resources, curriculum, for example)



Why (why not) school autonomy?

- In *theory*, greater school autonomy gives the power to make decisions to those who have first-hand knowledge of the challenges they face and what they need to solve it
- *But*, are school principals, boards and teachers always equipped to identify challenges, to know the solutions and implement them?
- The question is, then, should countries *enhance or limit* school autonomy? Do we know when, where and how it works to promote student outcomes?



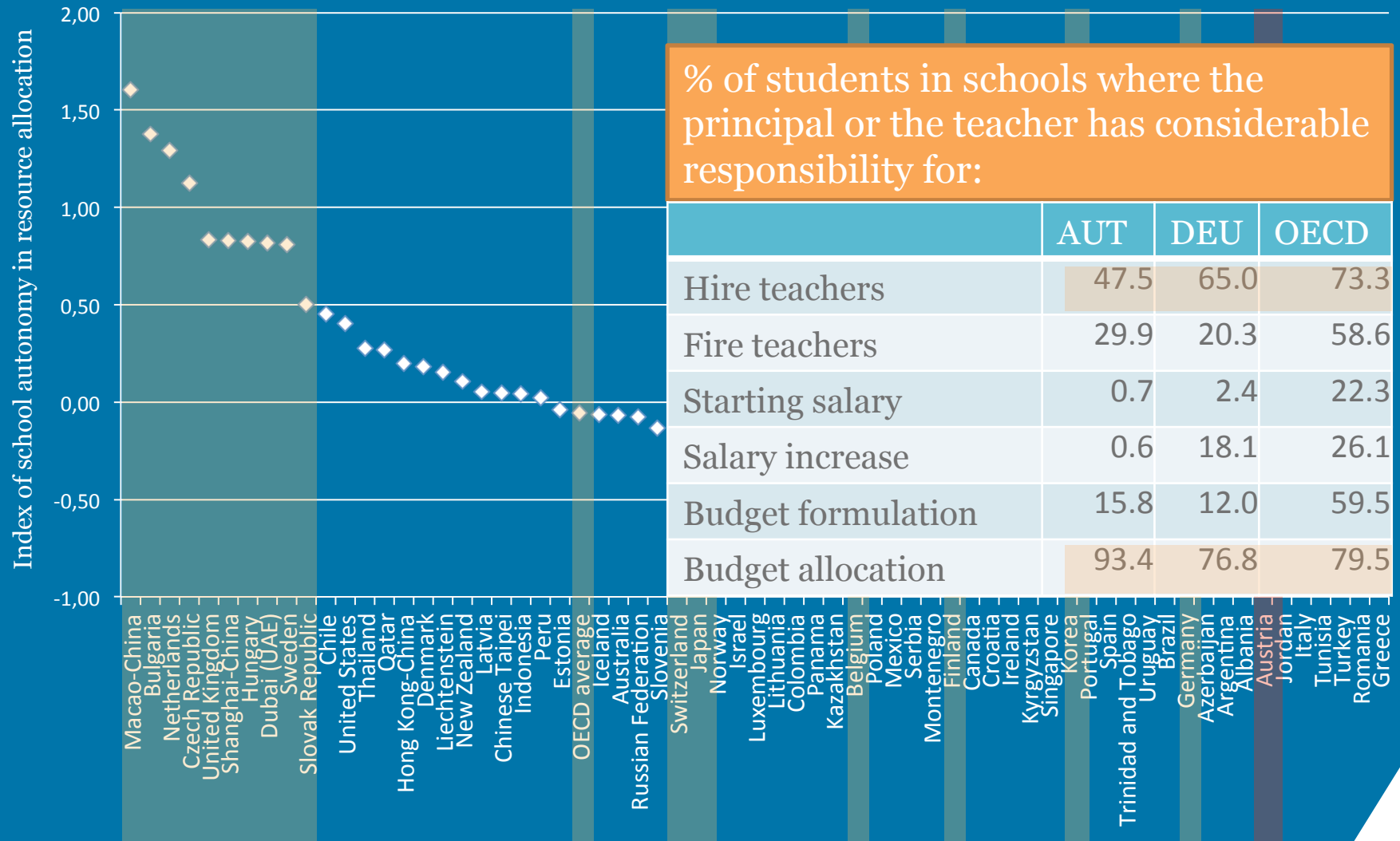
School autonomy in PISA

- PISA: International study of student performance in reading, mathematics and science (60+ countries, 450,000+ 15-year-old students)
- Additional questions to school principals: autonomy
 - Regarding your school, who has a considerable responsibility for the following tasks
 - *Principals, teachers*, school governing board, regional education authority, national education authority

Resources	Curriculum and assessment
Selecting teachers for hire	Choosing which textbooks are used
Firing teachers	Determining course content
Note: there are other forms of autonomy, but these are the forms of autonomy that we measured in PISA 2009. Other conceivable forms of autonomy cover selection of students, the educational project, allocation of teachers to classes, awarding bonuses, internal evaluations of the school or teachers, etc.	
Deciding on budget allocations within the school	



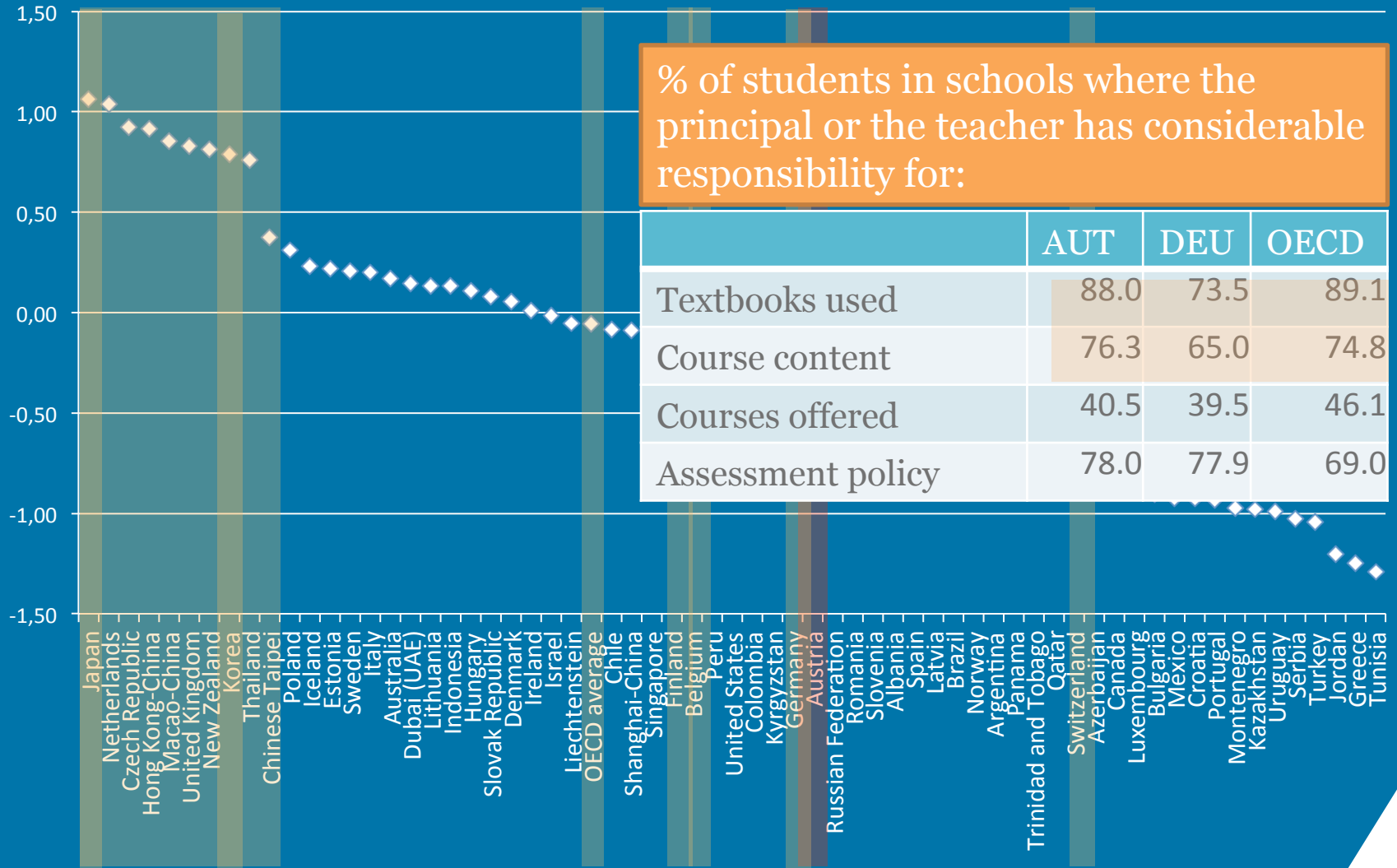
Resource autonomy in PISA





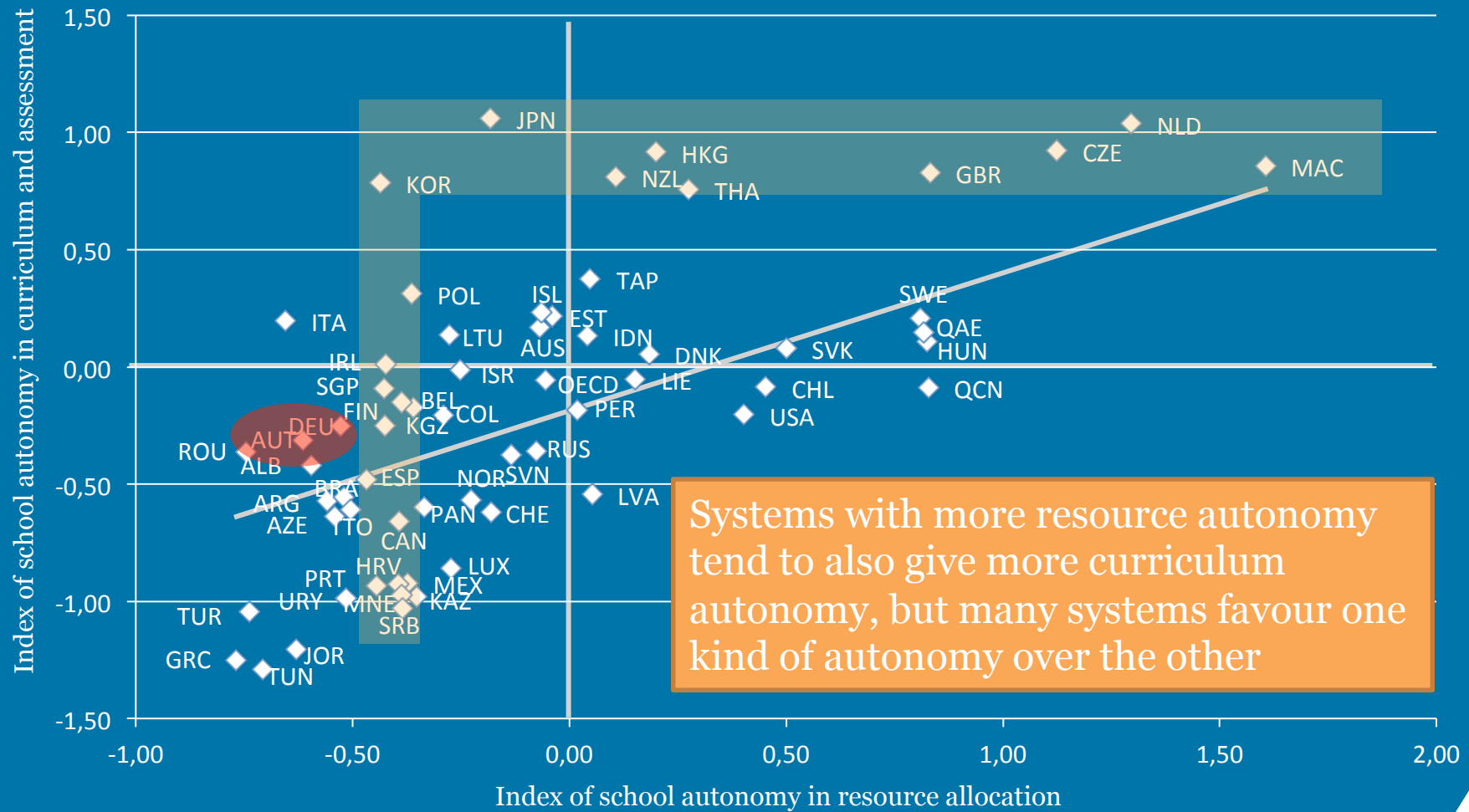
Curriculum autonomy in PISA

Index of school autonomy in curriculum and assessment



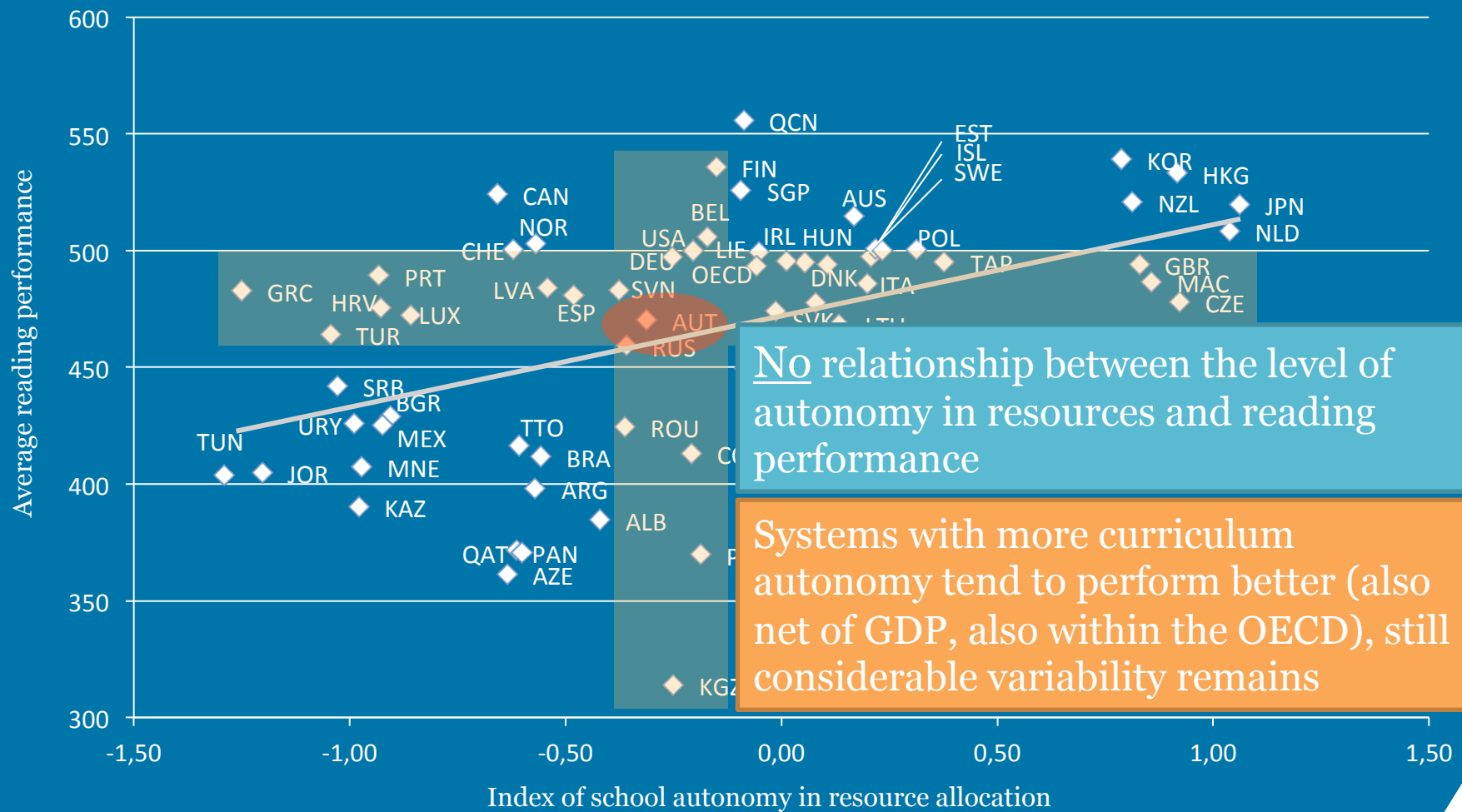


Curriculum and resource autonomy





Relationship between autonomy and performance





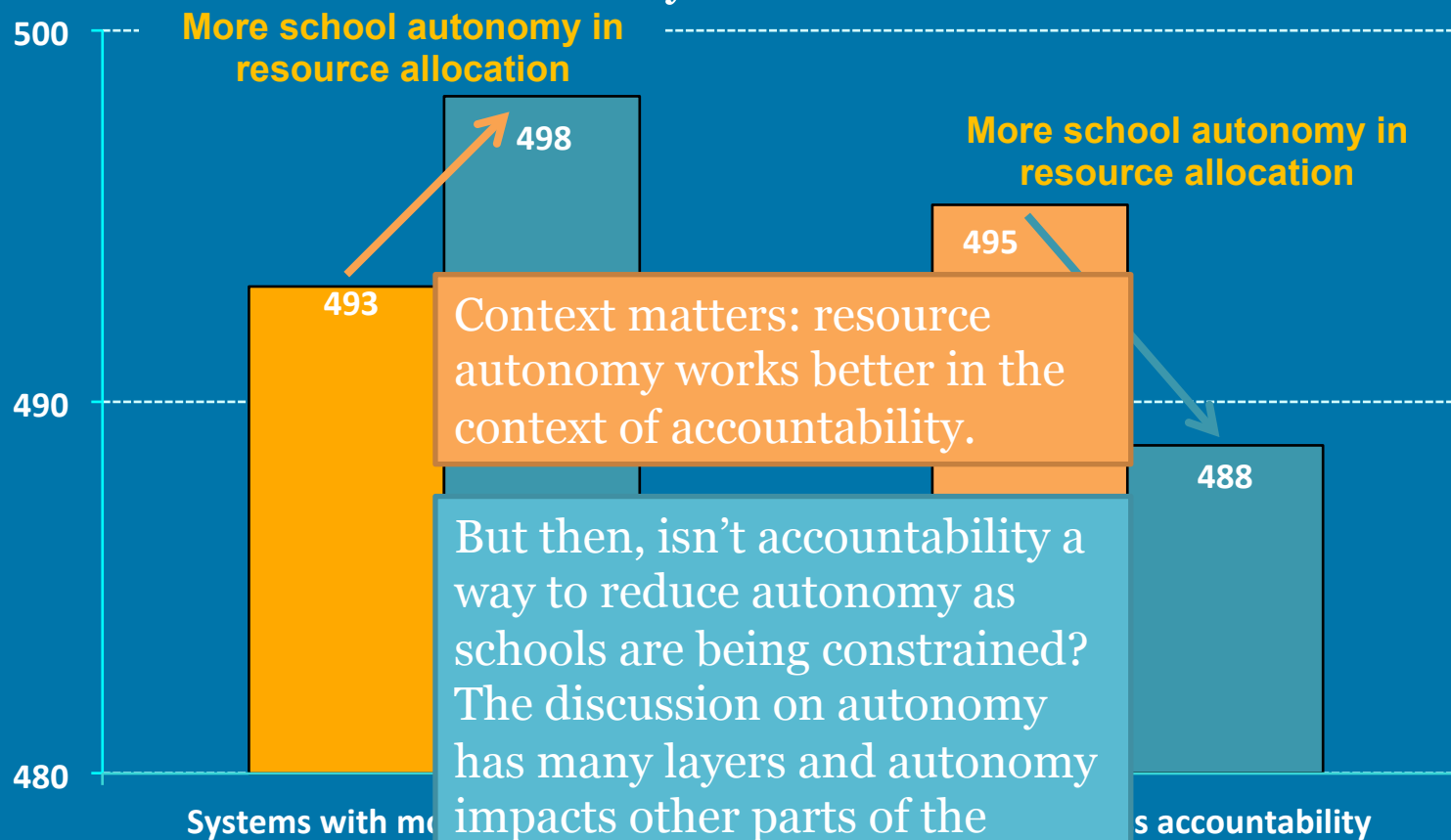
Relationship between autonomy and performance

Yes, but...



Relationship between autonomy and performance

- Countries with more resource autonomy perform better only in the context of accountability





Relationship between autonomy and performance

- Within specific countries, schools with more autonomy have higher performance* ?

– Curriculum autonomy

Giving more autonomy to schools does not necessarily bring any benefits. The most important education reform needs to be curriculum objectives, capacity building and

– Resource autonomy

- No: in 31 OECD countries
- Yes: in Chile and Korea

In general, within each country, schools with more autonomy tend to be of higher socioeconomic status, private schools with power to attract more advantaged or academically capable students, or to select their students, so they perform better because of this selection process, not necessarily because of autonomy per se.

For a national policy discussion on autonomy, the effectiveness of autonomy needs to be analysed after accounting for this selection process.

* After accounting for the other form of autonomy, public/private schools, school competition, students' socioeconomic background, school size and school location



For a discussion on autonomy

- So what does this tell us about a discussion on autonomy?
- Discussion about autonomy is one that is worth having:
 - Many countries are experimenting with autonomy and the theoretical argument is politically attractive for some

Yes, so...



For a discussion on autonomy

Discussion should not be autonomy: YES! vs. autonomy: NO! It is much more complex than that.

1. Autonomy for *what* and *to what extent*

- Many forms of autonomy
 - Resource allocation, resource level
 - Curriculum and assessment
 - Selection of students, funding
 - ...and a long etc.
- Technical dimension: what does the evidence say in terms of promoting student and school outcomes (in all domains, not just mathematics and reading)?
- Political dimension: what kind of educational system do we want? Is autonomy in schools consistent with the broader context of administrative autonomy in other services?



For a discussion on autonomy

2. Look at the *data* carefully:
 - What benefits one individual school may not benefit the entire system if it is just a redistribution of students and resources (selection?)
 - Will all schools have the ability to benefit from more autonomy?
3. Consider the *context* in which autonomy will be implemented
 - Will schools still have the incentives to set and meet their objectives and contribute to the national objectives?
 - Will schools have the ability to make good use of autonomy (capacity for self-evaluation, to identify challenges, identify solutions and implement them)?
4. Think carefully about the *consequences* (expected and unintended) and how it will affect the broader organizational context
 - Will autonomy promote selection or skimming of students?
 - Will autonomy in the context of accountability promote teaching to the test?
 - Will more autonomy require more training for teachers and school principals?
 - Will schools that need support be able to receive it from other sources?



Concluding remarks

If you can only remember one slide, let it be
this one:



Concluding remarks

- The take-away point (v2):
 - Autonomy is *not*, in and of itself, a source for better student outcomes or greater efficiency in the educational system
 - Greater autonomy in some domains is successful in some contexts and some countries
 - Autonomy? Yes? No?
 - For it to be successful it assumes
 - Clear objectives
 - Capacity at the school level for good decisions to be made and implemented
 - Successful reforms of autonomy should consider the complexity of the school system, organisational context more broadly to avoid unintended consequences and ensure success

It depends...



For more information, see:

- OECD CERI: Governing complex education systems ([LINK](#))
- OECD PISA ([LINK](#))
 - PISA 2009 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? ([LINK](#))
 - PISA in Focus 9: School autonomy and accountability: are they related to student performance? ([LINK](#))
 - 2012 results: December 3rd, 2013
 - Launch event in Vienna with Minister Schmied



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