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Theme Areas

Publications

Policy Impact

Multimedia



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Development Challenges, Tuition Barriers and High School Education in China

Journal Article

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China has made remarkable progress along the path of economic transformation over the past three decades. To continue its rapid growth in an economy with increasingly higher wages, China's key challenge is whether it can become competitive in quasi-skilled and skilled industrial sectors so that upscale factories can be induced to establish themselves in China? This study seeks to increase our understanding of high school education in China at a time when the nation is facing challenges in its development path. Using secondary statistics, we have found that educational access at the high school level is quite low—especially in poorer areas of rural China. We argue that the low level of access to high school education in China may be a problem resulting from high tuition and fees. We include empirical evidence about the tuition barrier argument by using a survey of 41 developing and developed countries and a representative survey of 1,177 students from one of China's poorest provinces. We demonstrate that not only is financing high school a burden for the families of poor students, but also there is little financial aid available. The quality of education of students from poor rural areas prior to entering high school is also a problem. We conclude with a recommendation that in poor rural areas of China high school should be made free, as it is in most of the rest of the world—and efforts should be made to improve rural education in general.

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