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Decentralization of the Turkish Education System: Will School Autonomy Matter?

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Education Reform Initiative

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Aydın Doğan Foundation (10)

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Turkey's 2023 Goals and What Has to be Done in Education

- Increase enrollment rate in pre-school, primary and secondary education to 100%.
- Improve the quality of vocational education.
- Implement a national policy of foreign language education
- Digitalize the whole education infrastructure and materials
- Decrease gender disparities in education
- Decrease student-teacher ratio to 20-to-1.
- Increase the quality of teacher training
- Improve education management by implementing national standards and quality framework.
- Make human capital the main driver of economic development and technological advancement
- Prepare students to university in a more flexible education system.

Political Importance of Education in Turkey

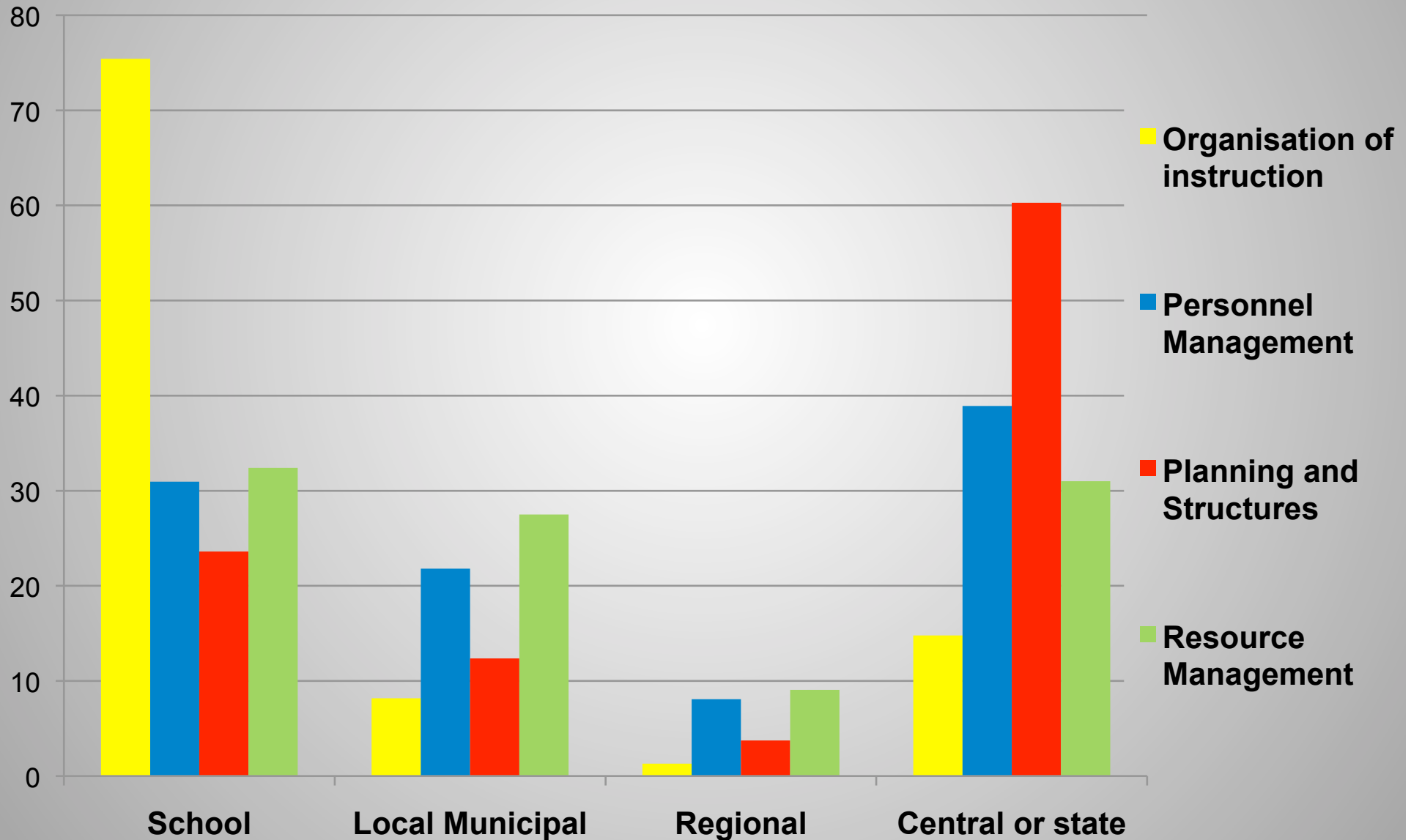
- Sam Kaplan in his book The Pedagogical State points out: “Education, childhood, and child development have become tropes with which whole variety of social and political imaginaries are woven in Turkey.” (Stanford University Press, 2006).
- Its role in nation building since the Republic
 - A vast and highly centralized bureaucracy was created (850.000)
- MoNE versus ministry of education?
- Education as a vehicle of upward economic and social mobility
- Occupied a central role for the unity of the nation
- Groups at issue with republican secular reforms use tried to capture the education system: religion, ethnicity.

Decentralization and Education

Process of delegating or devolving educational authority and responsibility from the central government to regions, provinces, districts, schools and school communities.

PS: More than 20 definitions of decentralization in public policy literature

Multidimensionality of Education Governance: School Autonomy in Main Fields of Education OECD Average



Decentralization and Performance

- **OECD (2010) data: prevalence of school autonomy in defining and elaborating curricula and assessment relates positively to the performance of school systems, even after accounting for national income.**
- **Yet, the relation between school autonomy in resource allocation and personnel management and school performance differ by country.**
- **Too much preoccupation at schools with all details of the budget and resource allocation, setting salaries, and allocations may overburden/distract school managers.**
- ***Yet,* within countries where schools are held to account for their results through posting achievement data publicly, schools that enjoy greater autonomy in resource allocation tend to do better than those with less autonomy.**

Decentralization and Equality

- **One problem with certain forms of decentralization: Increasing inequality between provinces, districts, and schools. Especially, if they are left to their own financially and completely dependent on the local tax base and local arrangements.**
- **In the U.S., “*Decentralization was wonderful for the initial diffusion of high schools; but it created geographic inequality.*”** (Lawrance Katz, quoted in NewYorkTimes, 2013)
- **In Turkey: Centralization was useful in increasing access to basic education, enrollment and aiding nation-building, but fails to meet demands of the knowledge society centered on human capital development, participation and democratic recognition of local needs.**

Evolving Approach to Accountability

- **Conventional accountability: Focus on processes and teaching environments (inspectorates)**
- **Broader accountability: Focus on outcomes, student achievement and well-being.**
- **Increasingly, schools across the OECD are having to account to a range of bodies (education ministries, local councils), and also to the wider community, parents and education partners through accreditation and quality assurance processes.**

Lesson From Finland

Finland's Education Reforms in the early 1980s, by

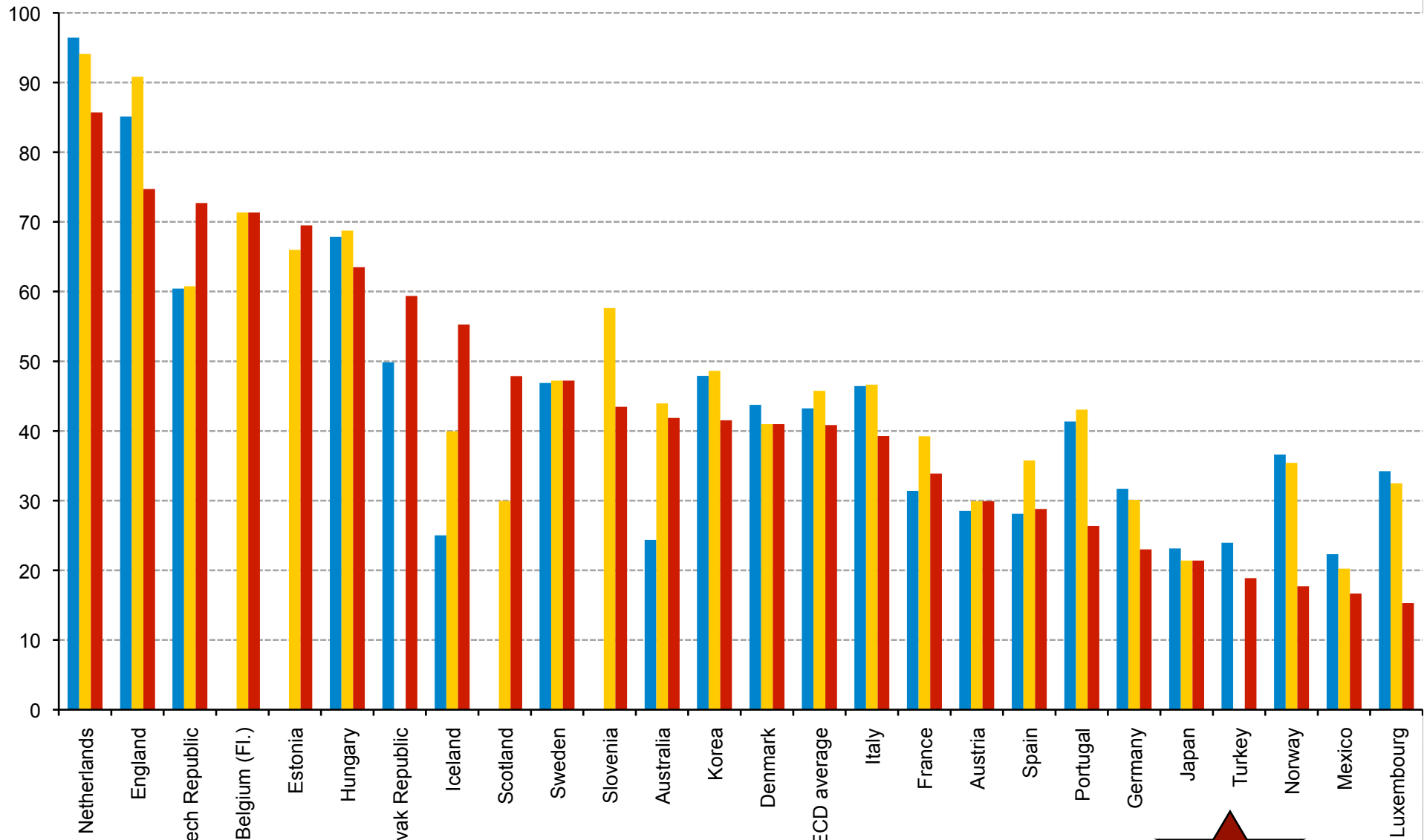
- **Significantly improving teacher education/training via rigorous academic standards**
- **Increasing teachers' salaries**
- **Dismantling central regulations (i.e. giving autonomy to teachers/schools) on the organization of instruction (textbook selection, exams)**
- **Replacing oppressive school inspections with outcome oriented accountability measures**
- **Monitoring school performance by selected sample, instead of massive exams for all students**

A. Ripley, 2013

The Smartest Kids in the World, and How They Got that Way

Comparative Picture and Trends in School Autonomy by Year (OECD, 2012)

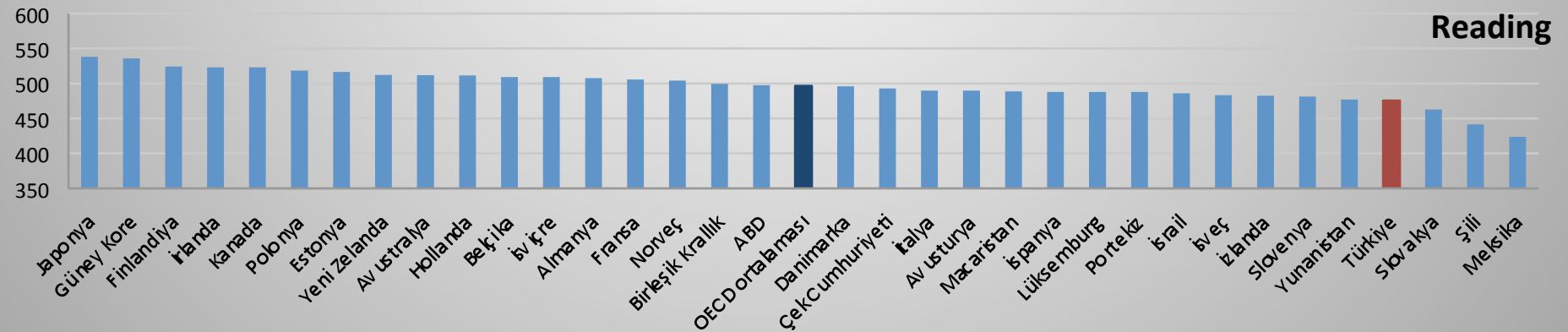
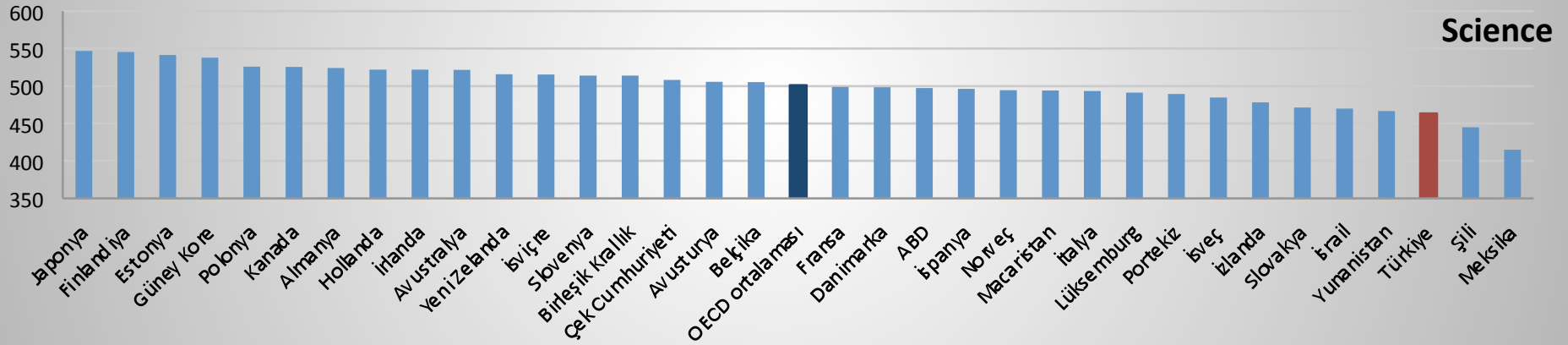
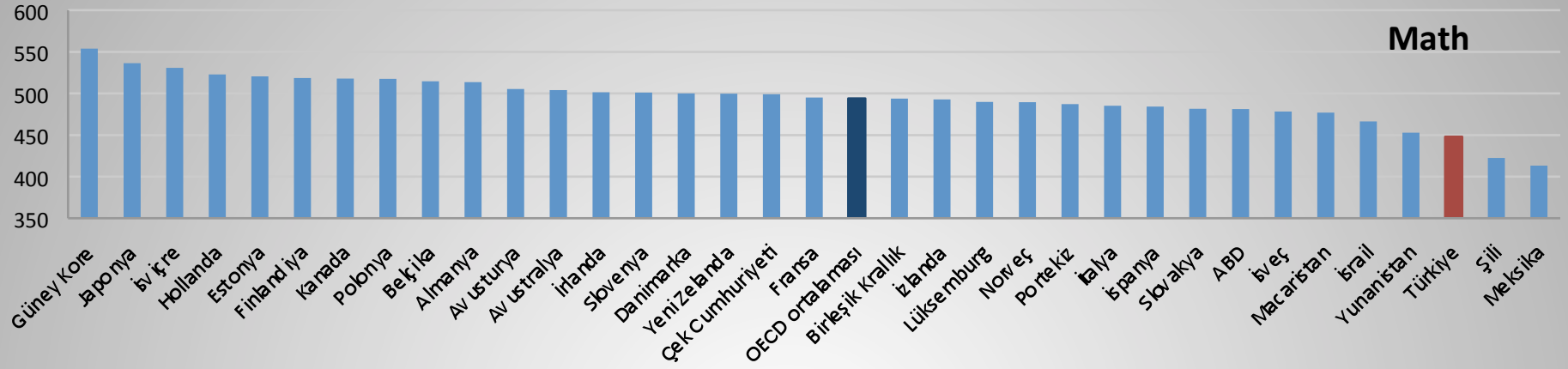
■ 2003 ■ 2007 ■ 2011



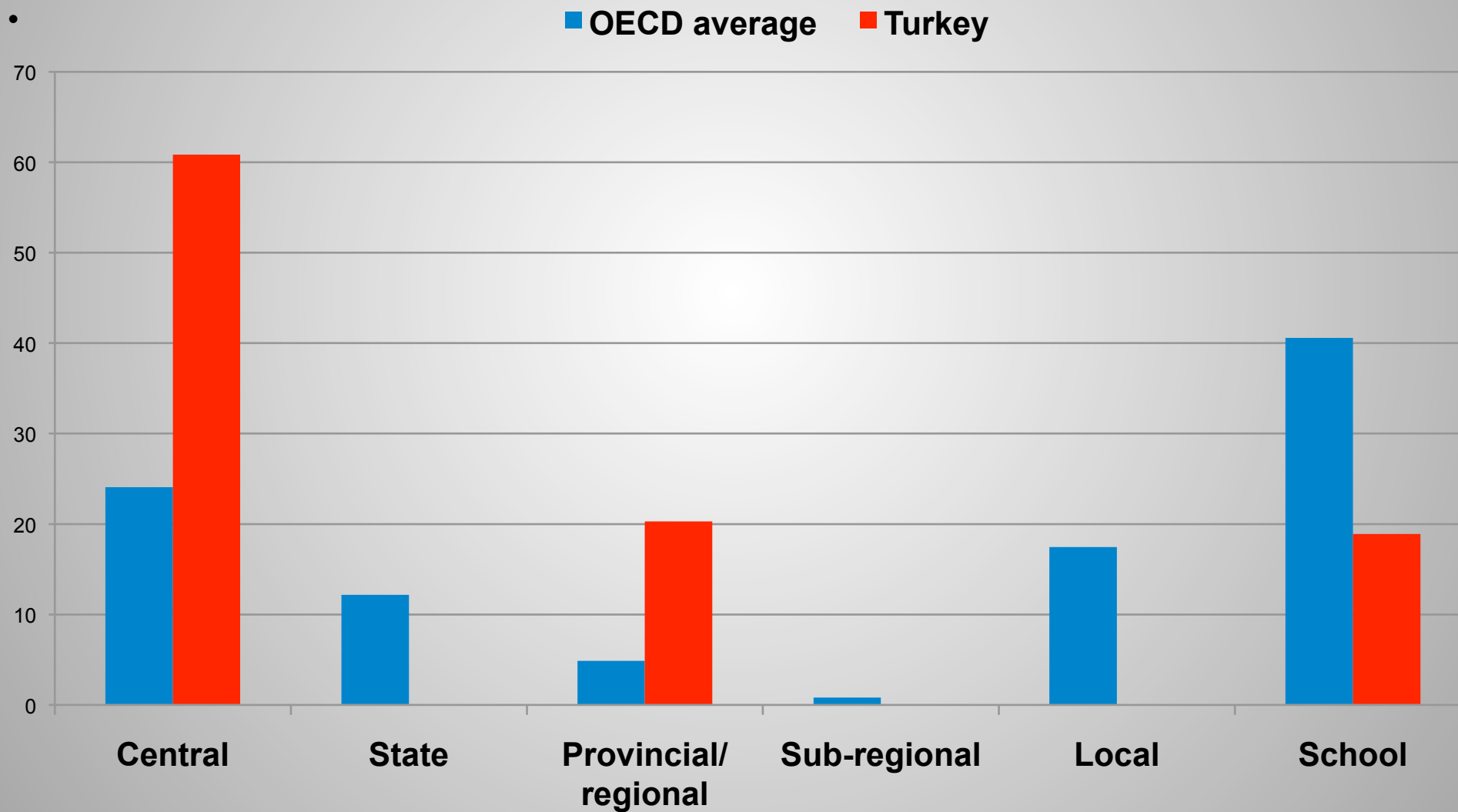
Centralization of the Education System in Turkey

PISA Scores as an Indicator of System Performance

PISA 2012 Average Scores Among Member States



Distribution of All Education Decisions by Decision-Making Location Turkey and OECD



A Reminder

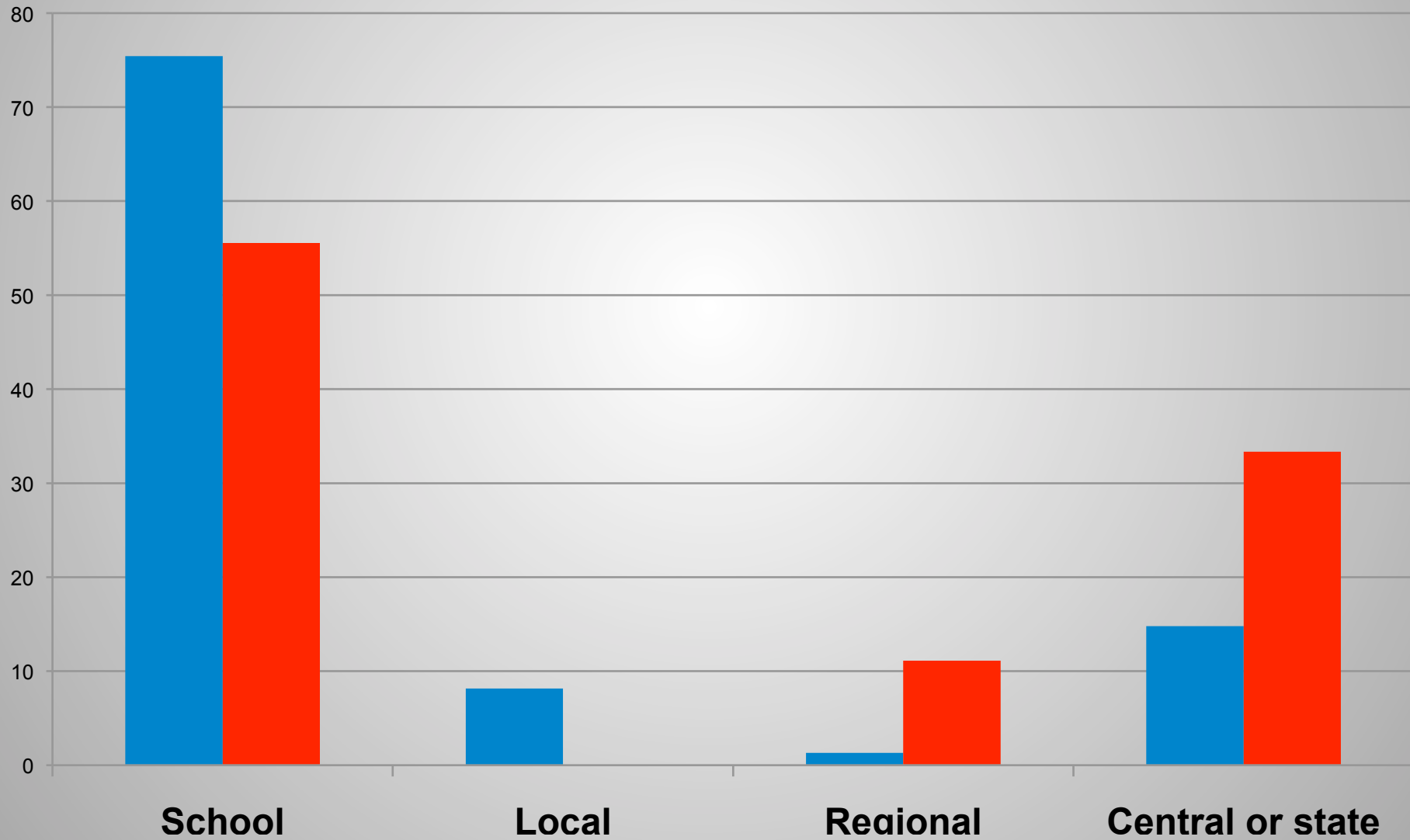
- Private schools account **for 4.0 percent** of all students in Turkey in pre-university education.
- Of all schools in Turkey only **10.8 percent** are private.

Turkish Education System

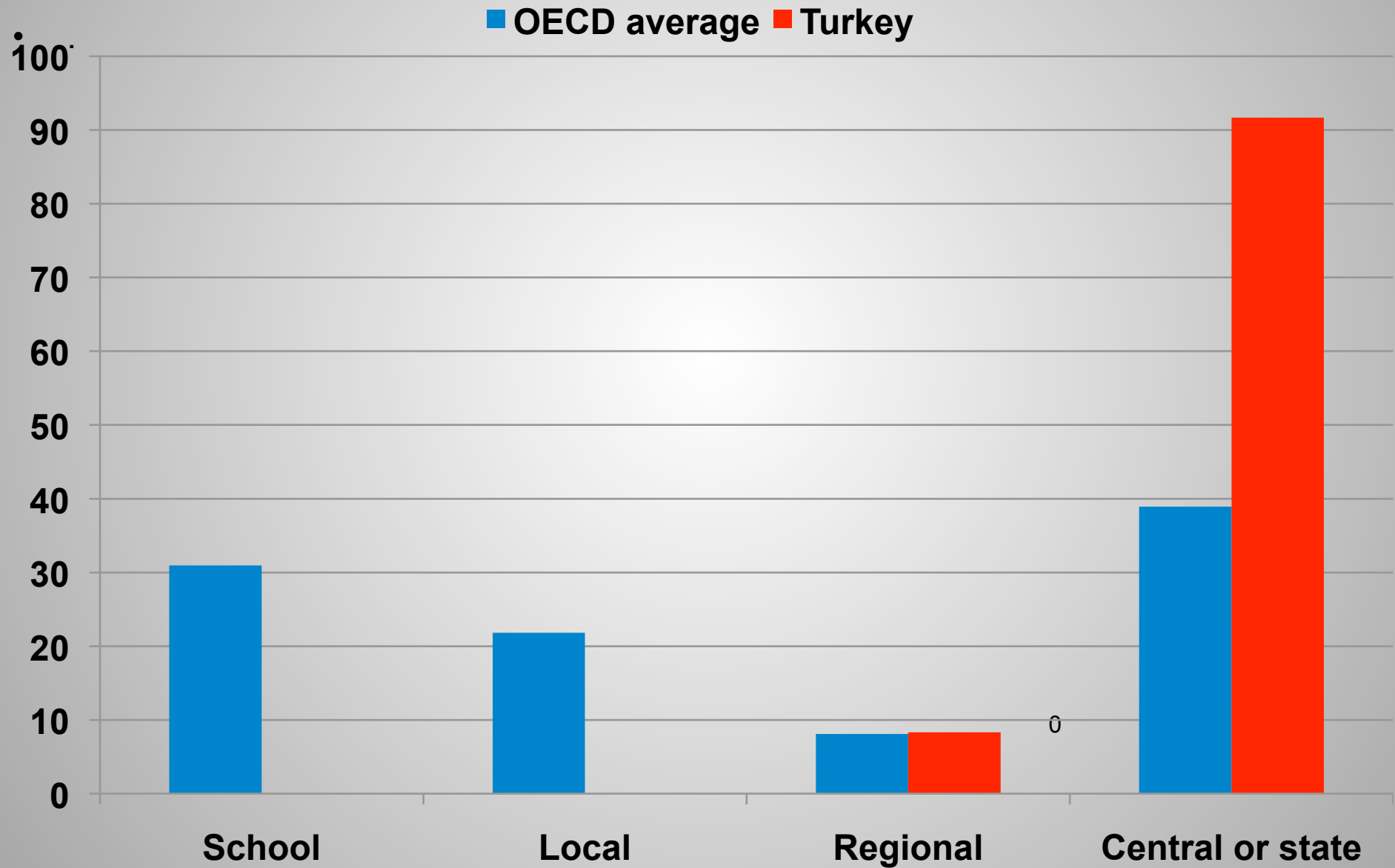
- **Among OECD, Turkey has the most centralized and top-heavy system, leaving no room for local innovation and initiatives by schools.**
- **Very inefficient resource allocation (funding) mechanism in which schools have no power.**
- **Politically, the system is geared to impart an ideology that emphasizes a reverence for the state versus the individual, and learning by rote at the expense of critical thinking**
- **Dissatisfaction from a variety of social groups on the basis of cultural rights and bilingual education**

Distribution of Decisions in Organization of Instruction

■ OECD average ■ Turkey

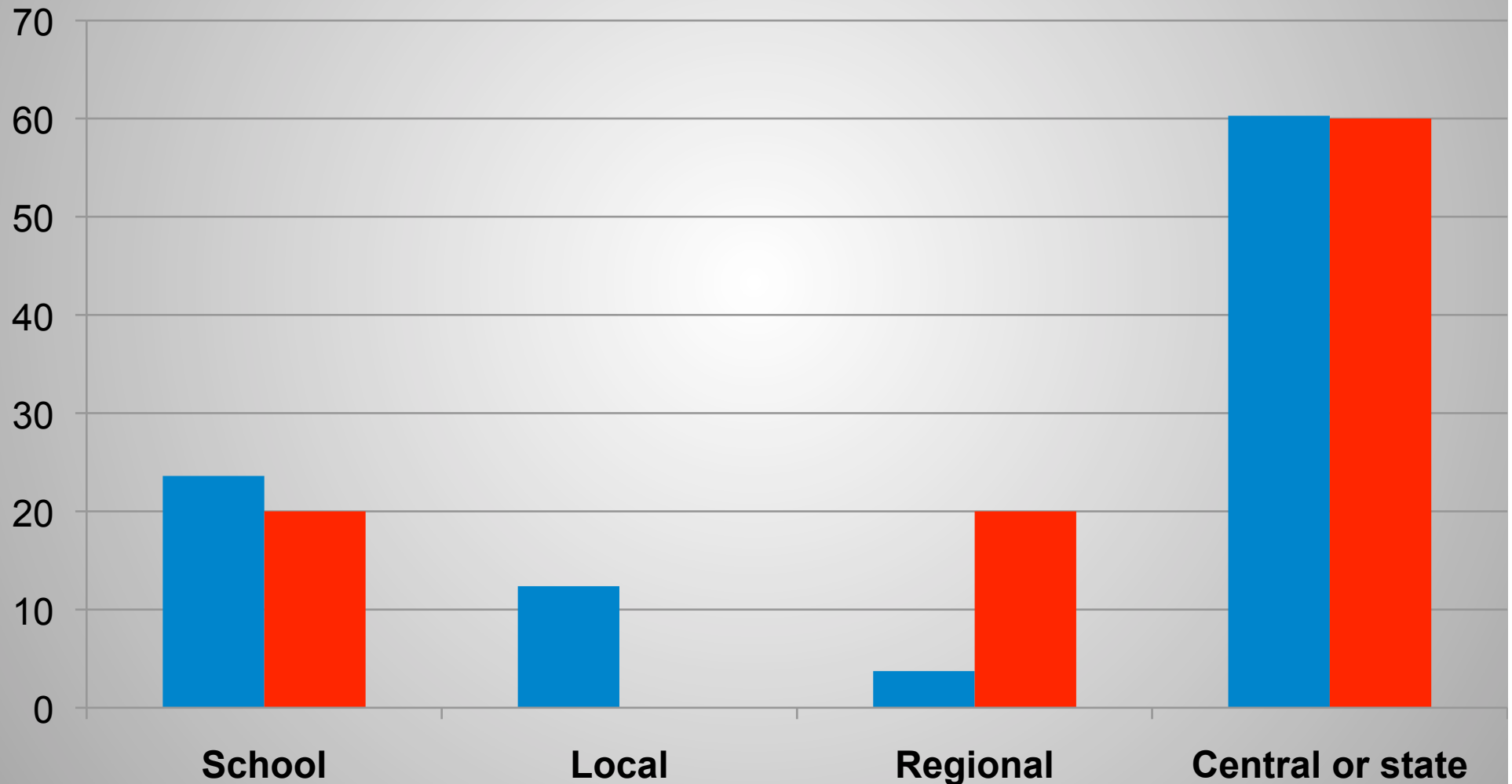


Distribution of Decisions in Personnel Management



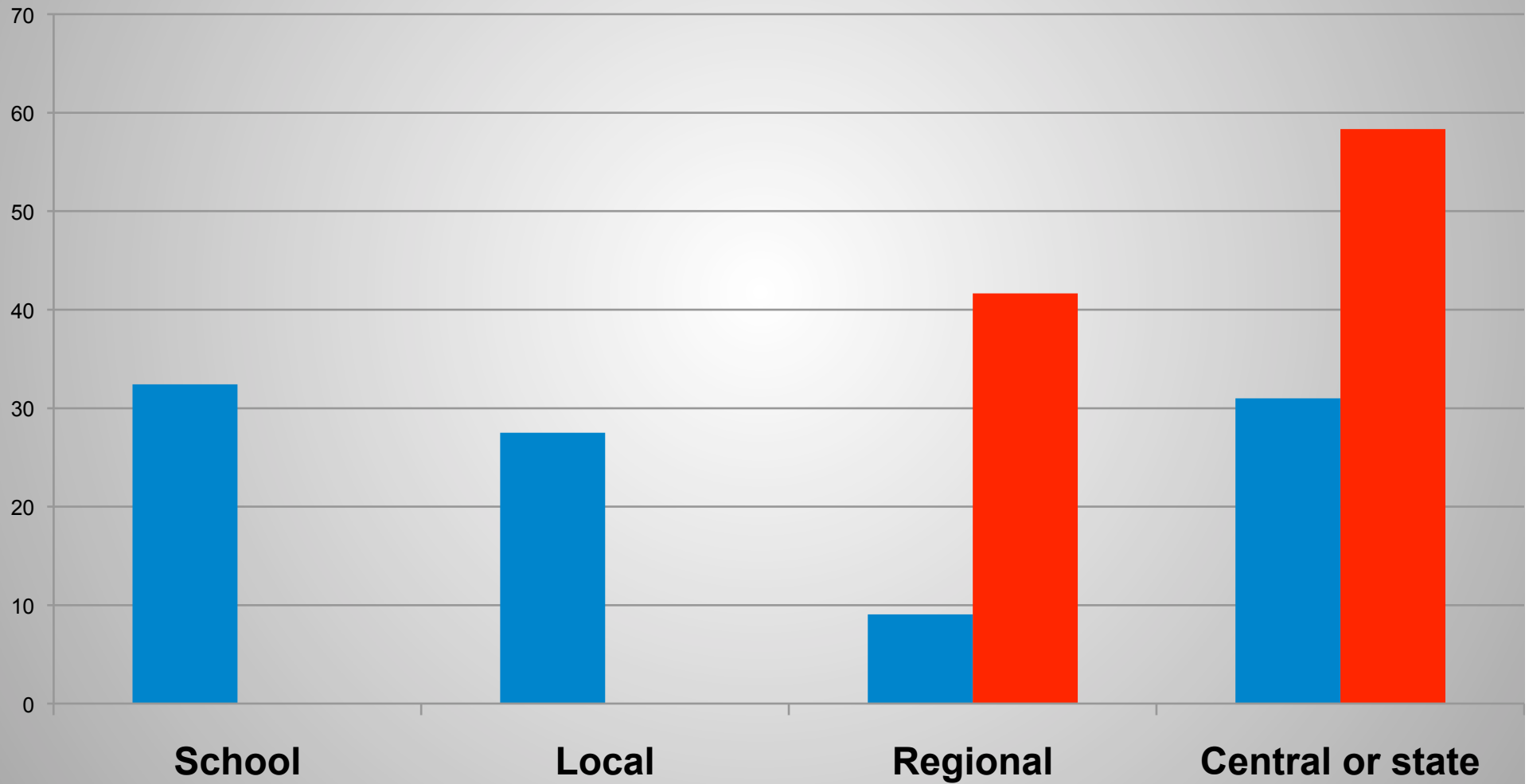
Distribution of Decisions in Planning and Structures

■ OECD average ■ Turkey



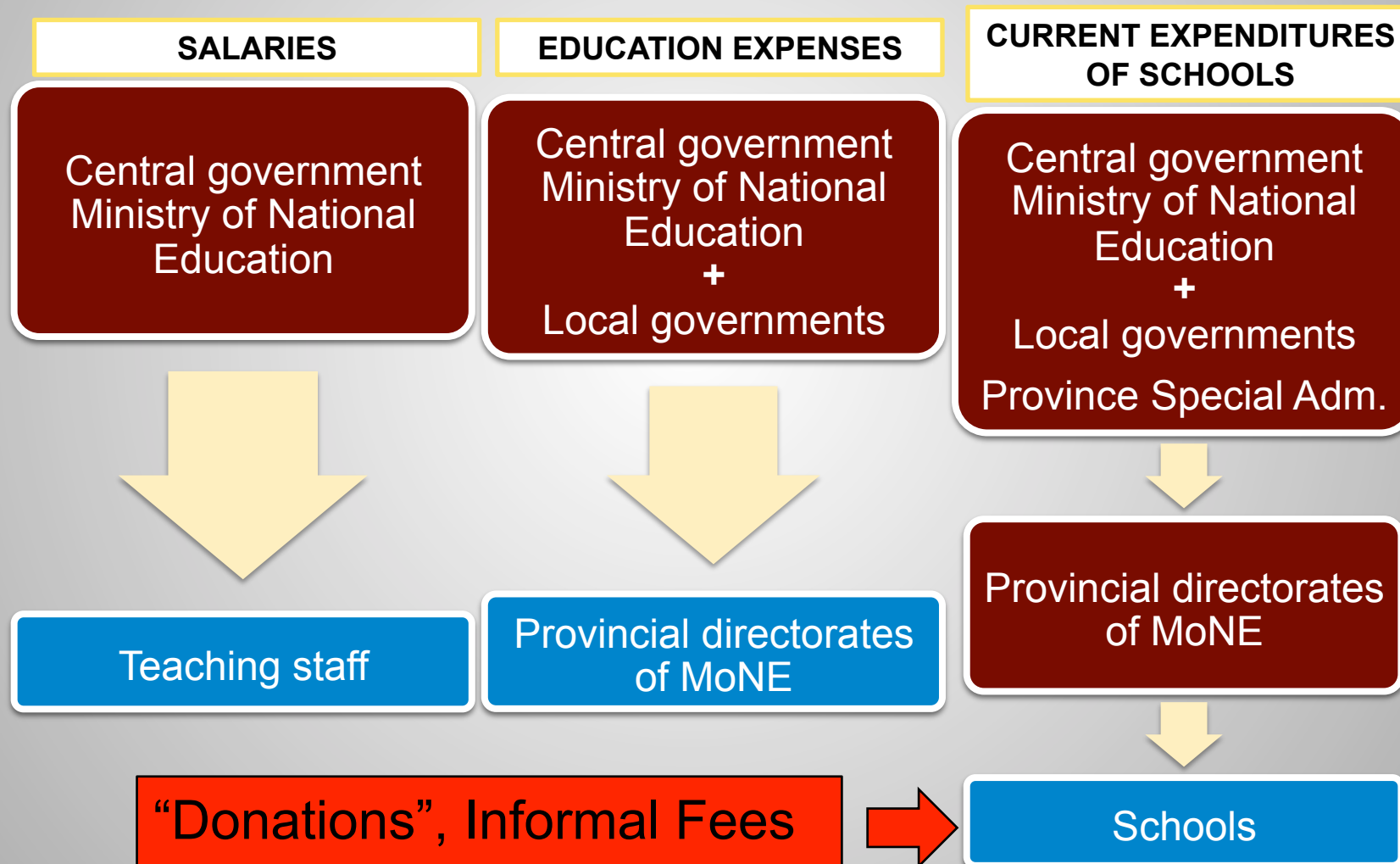
Distribution of Decisions in Resource Management (Funding)

■ OECD average ■ Turkey



Resource Management

Financial Flows in Turkish Education Governance



Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Resources and Personnel Management

Schools needs to have more autonomy and discretion in allocating resources for education, and to some extent, in personnel management

Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Organization of Instruction

More autonomy to schools and teachers in choosing textbooks, education material is evidently needed.

The new transition to upper secondary education exam system could be

- **A window of opportunity:** performance expectations from schools and teachers can be translated into demands to empower schools
- **An obstacle:** central exams students will take each semester may force teachers to prioritize exams over learning, and decrease teacher autonomy/initiative in instruction.

Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Restructuring of the MONE Central Organization in 2011

Window of Opportunity:

- **Recent restructuring of the MONE's central administration (reduction in the number of directorates, consolidating of some directories and divisions, creation of a new cadre of education specialists) could be a step towards a more efficiently operating central apparatus, with better planning, monitoring and implementation capacity in a more decentralized setting.**

Turkey's Education Decentralization Has To Target Increasing Quality and Democracy in Managing and Delivering Education

- **A New Division of Labour Among the Central Administration (MoNE), Local Branches of the MoNE, Municipalities, Local Development Agencies, and Schools Have to be Devised**
 - **School Autonomy Needs to be Increased**
- **A New Political Culture of Education Has to be Instilled: Nation building versus quality and civics? Consensus???**
- **A New Resource Management Mechanism Needs to be Developed**
- **The obvious: Resources Devoted to Education at National and Local Levels Have to Increase**



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Need for Quality Assurance

- However, it maybe difficult given the inertia of the existing system and political problems.
- Pilot projects?
- An independent quality review agency.
- Independent accreditation.
- Should not have any organizational links with MONE.