

# State Reforms and Informal Payments in Secondary Education of Kazakhstan

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## Abstract

This paper explores the issue of informal payments in the education sector. State underinvestment in education has significantly increased the scope of informal payments in the post-independence period. The authorities of Kazakhstan have legalized informal payments by introducing Councils of Trustees, creating open school budget accounts, and making changes in the distribution of public expenditures. Although these measures have reduced informal payments in schools, the money received from parents is still an important part of school budgets.

## Keywords

Kazakhstan – education – informal payments – schools

This article focuses on state reforms and informal payments in the educational sector of Kazakhstan. It seeks to answer the following question: Why do informal payments continue to exist in schools despite the government's efforts to reduce them? The study suggests that although the introduction of some measures—such as the creation of Councils of Trustees, changes in the distribution of public expenditures for high schools, and creating open school budget accounts—have reduced informal payments, ongoing state underinvestment in the education sector still fosters informal payments. In the 1990s, the public sector experienced significant budget cuts that led to the under provision of public goods and services to the population. The educational sector was not an exception. Even in the best years when Kazakhstan had 8–9% of

economic growth and the government fueled money to the healthcare and education sectors, the share of the GDP allocated to education was about 4%.<sup>1</sup>

The education system has faced significant changes, including the introduction of new curricula, the emergence of private schools and universities, and a decline in the status of teachers. One of the implications of budget cuts was the deterioration in quality of both secondary and higher education. Although over the last few years the government has increased financial support to the education system, schools continue to experience some financial shortages. To compensate for the underinvestment in secondary education and gain access to quality education, people make informal payments.

There is a growing body of literature on informal institutions, including informal payments, in the post-Soviet space.<sup>2</sup> Scholarship on Central Asia posits that informal institutions—networks, corruption, blat, nepotism, and others—are a Soviet or even pre-Soviet legacy that continues to shape modern state–society relations.<sup>3</sup> A number of authors have looked at the transformation of reciprocal informal exchanges.<sup>4</sup> They focused on informal institutions and their variations in different sectors of the economy, including informal exchanges in the civil service,<sup>5</sup> party politics,<sup>6</sup> the healthcare

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1 The government expenditures on education, World Bank Data, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=KZ>, accessed April 28, 2020.

2 Alena Ledeneva, “Blat and Guanxi: Informal Practices in China and Russia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50, no. 1(2008): 118–144; John Morris and Abele Polese, *Informal Economics in Post-Socialist Spaces: Practices, Institutions, and Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Natsuko Oka, “Informal Payments and Connections in post-Soviet Kazakhstan,” *Central Asian Survey*, 34, no. 3 (2015): 330–340.

3 Gullette, D., *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and ‘Tribalism’* (New York: Brill/Global Oriental, 2010); Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of ‘Blood’ in Kazakhstan and Beyond*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Edward Schatz, “Re-conceptualizing Clans: Kinship Networks and Statehood in Kazakhstan,” *Nationalities Papers* 33, no. 2 (2010): 321–254.

4 Kelly McMann, *Corruption as a Last Resort: Adapting to the Market in Central Asia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014); Oka, *Informal Payments*, 330–340.

5 J. Egnvall, “Why are Public Offices sold in Kyrgyzstan?,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30, no. 1 (2014): 67–85; J.Egnvall, “The State as Investment Market; A framework for Interpreting the Post-Soviet State in Eurasia,” *Governance* 28, no. 1 (2015): 25–40.

6 Rico Isaacs, *Party system formation in Kazakhstan: Between formal and informal politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

sector,<sup>7</sup> housing,<sup>8</sup> and employment.<sup>9</sup> Some research has been done on informal payments in the education sector in transition countries, including Central Asian states.<sup>10</sup> Heyneman and his associates, focusing on corruption in higher education in Central Asia, argue that the level of corruption increased in comparison to the Soviet period due to decentralized bureaucracy, the proliferation of private universities, and the lack of experience with enforcing professional norms. These scholars provide a typology of corrupt practices in higher education based on considerations concerning buyers and sellers.<sup>11</sup> Christopher Witsel, examining informal payments in Tajikistan, has differentiated between corruption expenses and informal costs. The former are defined as “payments to access education or to change educational records,” while the latter include unofficial costs that have to be made to support daily operations and activities in schools.<sup>12</sup> Another important work on informal payments in the education sector was written by Kazimzade and Lepisto, who have provided

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- 7 Rechel, B., Erica Richardson, and Martin McKee, “Trends in Health Systems in the Former Soviet Countries,” 2014., Available at [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/261271/Trends-in-health-systems-in-the-former-soviet-countries.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/261271/Trends-in-health-systems-in-the-former-soviet-countries.pdf?ua=1) (accessed November 15, 2016); E. Johnson, “Non-state Health Care Provision in Central Asia: Cooperative or Competitive?,” in Charles Ziegler, ed., *Civil Society and Politics in Central Asia* (Kentucky: The University Press, 2015); Dina Balabanova, Bayard Roberts, Erica Richardson, Christian Haerpfner, and Martin McKee, 2012, Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3419892> (accessed January 28, 2015); Dina Sharipova, “State Retrenchment and Informal Institutions in Kazakhstan: People’s perceptions of Informal reciprocity in the healthcare sector,” *Central Asian Survey*, 34, no. 3 (2015): 310–329.
- 8 Balihar Sanghera and Elmira Satybaldiyeva, “Ethics of property, illegal settlements and the right to subsistence,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32 No. 1/2, (2012): 96–114; Sharipova, *Who Gets What, When and How?*; Elmira Isabaeva, “From Denizens to citizens in Bishkek Informal Squatter Settlement Residents in Urban Kyrgyzstan,” *The Journal of Social Policy Studies*, 12, no. 2 (2014): 249–260.
- 9 Altay Mussurov and Arabsheibani, “Informal Self-employment in Kazakhstan,” *iza J Labor Development*, 4, no. 9 (2015).
- 10 Osipian, A. “Corruption hierarchies in higher education in the former Soviet Bloc,” *International Journal of Educational Development*, 3, no. 29 (2009): 321–330; Williams, C. and Onoshchenko, O. “Evaluating the Prevalence and Nature of Blat in post-Soviet Societies: A case Study of the Education Sector in Ukraine,” *International Journal of Social Economic*, 41, no. 9 (2014): 747–759; Heyneman, S, “Education and Corruption,” *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24 (2004): 637–648; Morris and Polese, *Informal Economics in Post-Socialist Spaces*, 2015.
- Oka, O. “Grades and Degrees for Sale: Understanding Informal Exchanges in Kazakhstan’s Education Sector,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66, no. 5, (2019): 329–341.
- 11 Heyneman, Stephen P., Kathryn H. Anderson, and Nazym Nuraliyeva, “The cost of corruption in higher education.” *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 1 (2007): 1–25.
- 12 Witsel, Christopher M., “Counting the Costs: Informal Costs and Corruption Expenses of Education in Post-Soviet Tajikistan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 3 (2011): 28–38.

a typology of informal payments in education based on two categories: voluntary and documented. The typology includes the following categories: (1) formal payments for mandatory educational activities, i.e. fees for diplomas, textbooks, etc.; (2) payments for elective educational activities such as attendance to exhibitions or museums; (3) private contributions to support general activities such as a gift for a computer for use by the class; (4) informal payments for elective activities for use by an individual child; (5) informal payments in responding to requests from the school; and (6) payments to specific faculty members or to a specific administrator in exchange for a service or favor for a specific child.<sup>13</sup>

Although scholars have explored the issue of informal payments, little research has been done on informal payments in secondary education in Kazakhstan. The most recent study was conducted by Natsuko Oka, who discussed issues such as the monetization of informal exchanges, the use of personal contacts, and vertical corruption in the education sector.<sup>14</sup> The existing explanations, however, do not focus on the role of the state and its poor investment in the education sector, which have led to the deterioration and under-provision of quality public goods and services. However, this dimension of the state's role is important to our understanding of the nature and causes of informal payments in Kazakhstan. In this regard, it is vital to look at the educational reforms in Kazakhstan to explain why informal payments continue to shape state–society relations in the education sector.

## 1 Educational Reforms in Kazakhstan: Success or Failure?

According to the Global Competitiveness Index, Kazakhstan is in 4th place among 137 states in terms of the scope of elementary education among the population.<sup>15</sup> Since 2005, the government adopted a number of programs, including the “State Program on Education Development for 2005–2010,” “State Program of Technical and Vocational Education for 2008–2012,” “Children of

13 Elmina Kazimzade and Eric Lepisto, *Drawing the Line: Parental Informal Payments for Education across Eurasia*, Open Society Institute's Education Support Program & Network of Education Policy Centers, available at <http://www.edupolicy.net/portfolio-posts/drawing-the-line-parental-informal-payments-for-education-across-eurasia/> (accessed January 16, 2019).

14 Oka, O. “Grades and Degrees for Sale: Understanding Informal Exchanges in Kazakhstan's Education Sector,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no 5, (2019): 329–341.

15 The Global Competitiveness Report, 2018, accessed on April 20, 2019, available at <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-competitiveness-report-2018>.

Kazakhstan for 2007–2011,” and “Balapan Program for Children of Pre-school Education for 2010–2014.” Currently, the reforms in education are implemented in accordance with the “State Program of Education Development for 2011–2020,” adopted in 2010. The program defines the ways of modernization of the educational system, including the development of pre-school education, professional development of the education practitioners, and the introduction of Internet education and e-learning. It also focuses on the modernization of higher education institutions and vocational education.

New reforms stipulate the transition to a new curriculum in all high schools. The goal is to make Kazakhstan a competitive country with a high level of human capital. New educational standards and curricula will allow students to learn functional literacy. Currently, the transition to the new program has occurred in grades 1, 2, 5, and 7 in secondary schools. Starting from September 2018, students of grades 3, 6, and 8 have been transferred to the new curriculum. One of the major changes in school programs is the introduction of trilingualism: Kazakh, English, and Russian. The new program demands that four subjects—Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Informatics—are taught in English starting from 2019. The government has launched this program as a pilot project in 153 schools. However, this reform has received a lot of criticism, especially around the unpreparedness of many schoolteachers to teach classes in English. As a result, the government had to retreat and slow down the enforcement of trilingualism. The new president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized that Kazakh and Russian will be primary languages of instruction in schools. Lessons in English will be taught but only in those schools which have enough capacity to do so.<sup>16</sup>

Many new reforms are launched first in the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (nis) established in the 2000s. The nis is a network of publicly funded schools that serve as “agents of change” and modernization of the secondary education system in the country. The schools provide a rather elite education with only less than 1% of the age cohort.<sup>17</sup> There are about 20 nis which have full autonomy in terms of “the design and adoption of program, forms and methods of educational activities, [and] direction for research.”<sup>18</sup> The program at the

16 Saule Isabayeva, “Perekhod na trekhiazychnoe obuchenie v shkolakh otmeniaetsia?” Camonitor.kz, April 4, 2019, available at <https://camonitor.kz/32861-perekhod-na-trehya-zychnoe-obuchenie-v-shkolah-otmenyaetsya.html> (accessed on April 28, 2020).

17 Alan Ruby and Colleen Mc Laughlin, “Transferability and the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools: Exploring Models of Practices Transfer,” in David Bridges, ed., *Educational Reform and Internationalizations: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

18 Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 394-iv, 2011.

nis was supposed to combine the “best practices of Kazakhstani education and international best pedagogic practice.”<sup>19</sup> One of the nis important tasks is to transfer experience to mainstream schools and indeed today the introduction of the new curriculum for secondary schools follows the nis model. However, there are some concerns about the nis consuming a large share of the budget for education. In addition, the selection of the best students and best teachers from all over the country exhausts the general education system.

Despite all these positive changes, there remain some important problems in secondary education. One of them is related to the shortage and low quality of textbooks. After conducting a review of more than 13,000 textbooks, the state center “Textbook” recommended rewriting about 3,400 textbooks and removing 3,500 of them from schools.<sup>20</sup> The delay in publication also leads to the shortage of textbooks. Before the 2017–2018 school year, a teacher from Aktobe said, “I am looking for textbooks for 7th grade for a few days. I even put an advertisement in the Internet: maybe, I can find used textbooks.” In Karagandy, parents also complained, “In the library we did not receive two textbooks—on Kazakh language and literature. Someone has not received three or even four textbooks.”<sup>21</sup> Parents have to buy learning materials on their own. At the same time, prices for textbooks are growing from year to year. According to the Law on Education, the Ministry of Education should provide all schoolchildren with free textbooks; however, due to problems with textbook publication, not all children can acquire them for free.<sup>22</sup> School librarians explain the situation as follows: if the number of students in 5th grade is 70 whereas the number of students of the same grade in the previous year was 50, then 20 textbooks are missing, because their replacement occurs only every five years.

Kuanysh Tastanbekova, an expert on education, said that the state standards for some textbooks were changed seven times from 2000 to 2017, resulting in a loss of efficiency.

Each time, the content of textbooks was completely rewritten. They [textbooks] were introduced very quickly without any analysis—what kind of knowledge, skills are required for the labor market of Kazakhstan— and without any control of factual, grammar and style errors. In order

19 Decree of the President of the RK, 9222, 2010.

20 “Ne uchat v shkole,” 18 December 2012. Available at <http://expertonline.kz/a193/> (accessed March 12, 2019).

21 “Uchebnikov v Kazakhstane khvatilo ne vsem,” 25.08.2016. Available at <https://camonitor.kz/25104-uchebnikov-v-kazahstane-hvatilo-ne-vsem.html> (accessed March 13, 2018).

22 Maira Aisina, “Sistema obrazovaniia eshche ne sovsem gotova k nachalu uchebnogo goda,” <https://camonitor.kz/13262-mayra-aysina-cistema-obrazovaniya-eshe-ne-sovsem-gotova-k-nachalu-uchebnogo-goda.html> (accessed February 24, 2018).

to spend the money quickly, nobody remembered if the authors of textbooks know how to write textbooks. People who write textbooks should know the psychophysical specificities of the child's development in accordance with her age.<sup>23</sup>

A teacher at School 144 in Kyzyl Orda, Sandugash Kulzhanova, also mentions that textbooks do not take into consideration the psychological and age specificities of children. "Texts are very voluminous and the design is not good. We prepared about 15 recommendations to the authors of textbooks."<sup>24</sup>

For more than 25 years, the system of education has undergone tremendous changes from highly centralized and free public education to a more decentralized and private landscape. The emergence of the NIS and transition to a new curriculum can be considered as successful steps toward reforming the education system, while the introduction of trilingualism in schools remains the most contested of the reforms in secondary education. Society is divided between those who support trilingualism and those who oppose it arguing that it might lead to the deterioration of the quality of education in general. The delay in the introduction of the 12-year study program and the shortage of well-written textbooks are also on the agenda of the Ministry of Education and Science. One of the big problems remaining to be solved by the government, however, is a low level of investment in education.

## 2 State Underinvestment and its Implications for Secondary Education

Public spending on education is one of the major concerns in Kazakhstan. Sharp declines in public spending occurred after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, it has not exceeded 3.5% of GDP. This is much lower than the 6% GDP recommended by UNESCO. According to the report by the Asian Development Bank, "there was virtually no new construction and little maintenance of educational facilities and equipment."<sup>25</sup> The underinvestment in education leads to poorly remunerated teachers; shortages of modern facilities,

23 Sara Sadyk, "Pochemu provalilis' reformy obrazovaniia v Kazakhstane: Vzgljad iz Iaponii Kuanysh Tastanbekovoi," January 31, 2017, Available at <https://camonitor.kz/30503-poche-mu-provalilis-reformy-obrazovaniya-v-kazakhstan-vzglyad-iz-yaponii-kuanysh-tastan-bekovoy.html> (accessed March 13, 2018).

24 Sara Sadyk, "Pochemu provalilis' reformy obrazovaniia" (accessed March 13, 2018).

25 adb (Asian Development Bank) (1995). Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan to the Republic of Kazakhstan for the

equipment, and textbooks; and overcrowded schools. By 2000, 30% of the country's schools required major repairs. Although 521 new schools were built and the construction of 34 new schools was launched in 2015, 69 schools required complete renovation.<sup>26</sup> In 2010, "37.4% of schools did not have access to drinkable water and every fifth school lacked either a dining room or canteen," while "26.4% of schools did not have gyms."<sup>27</sup> In addition, there is only one computer per 17 students and 40% of computers are outdated. In 2017, about 172 million tenge was allocated to increase the Internet speed; however, some schools are still without any connection to the Internet. According to school administrators, it is very difficult to receive money for complete school renovations, particularly in rural areas. As a school director notes, "There are many schools in need, but little money in the budget. It is necessary to increase expenditures for school renovations, for repair and maintenance of office equipment, school computers, for payments for software and other. However, there is [a] limit set by officials from the Ministry of Education".<sup>28</sup>

One of the recommendations provided by international organizations including the World Bank was to increase spending on education. The government of Kazakhstan has followed this recommendation, and since 2000, expenditures on education have been steadily growing. However, the analysis of school budgets shows that the increases in spending have occurred mainly due to the growth of salaries. Teacher and administration salaries use 81% of school budgets, which leaves little resources for the development of schools. The rise in remuneration began in 2009 when salaries were increased by 25%, then again by 25% in 2010 and 30% in 2011. In 2018, the government promised to raise salaries again by 30%. Thus, on average, a teacher earns 140,000 tenge in urban areas and about 160,000 tenge in rural areas.<sup>29</sup> Despite the fact that

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Educational Rehabilitation and Management Improvement Project. Manila: Asian Development Bank, p. 4.

- 26 State program on education and science development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016 through 2019. Available at [http://control.edu.gov.kz/sites/default/files/gpron\\_ukaz\\_ot\\_1.03.2016\\_no2015\\_1.pdf](http://control.edu.gov.kz/sites/default/files/gpron_ukaz_ot_1.03.2016_no2015_1.pdf) (accessed March 12, 2018).
- 27 State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, 2010, 0. 10, available at <https://strategy2050.kz/en/page/gosprog2/> (accessed March 5, 2018).
- 28 Sange, *Podushevoe finansirovanie: za i protiv* (Astana: Sange, 2013), p. 23, available at <http://sange.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FinancePerCapita2013.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2018).
- 29 Teachers in rural areas receive higher salaries due to the state policy to attract more young specialists to work in villages. "Skol'ko budut poluchat uchitel'ia v 2018 godu," January 15, 2018, available at <https://camonitor.kz/30399-skolko-budut-poluchat-uchitel'ia-v-2018-godu.html> (accessed March 13, 2018).

salaries were increased by 400% since 2000, they are still very low, at 70% of the country average. Recently, President Tokayev mentioned that salaries for school teachers would be raised twice within the next four years.<sup>30</sup>

It is also important to note that the increase in the budget for education does not mean that the money necessarily trickles down and is allocated evenly across all schools in the country. A large share of the educational budget is spent on a few institutions including the nis, Nazarbayev University, and Astana Knowledge City. For instance, the share of expenditures on nis was 3.2%, 5.4%, and 12.1% of the total share spent on education in 2009, 2010, and 2011, respectively.

Similarly, state expenditures per student increased from 49,600 tenge in 2005 to 163,100 tenge in 2010. However, “Public expenditures per student in Kazakhstan are lower than average spending on education in the third group of countries such as China, Turkey, and Russia. The difference is even bigger with such countries as Spain, South Korea, and Israel.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, within the country, the differentiation in spending per student across rural and urban areas remains significant. For instance, expenditures in ungraded schools are 2.9 lower than in general secondary schools and 2.6 times lower than in lyceums.<sup>32</sup> This leads to a discrepancy in terms of spending on the schools’ development. While rural schools have only 2.6% of the school budget for development, urban schools spend 16% of it.<sup>33</sup> In 2019, the government decided to change the distribution of public expenditures across high schools by introducing per capita spending for each school. Today this amount on average is 224,335 tenge<sup>34</sup> per capita annually. The main share of this amount goes to teachers’ salaries (186,874 tenge), with very little left for facilities maintenance (16,892 tenge), and capital renovation (15,150 tenge).<sup>35</sup> This amount can be changed

30 “Uchiteliam v Kazakhstane povysiat zarplaty v 2 raza,” available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/uchitelyam-v-kazahstane-povyisyat-zarplatyi-v-2-raza-376685/](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/uchitelyam-v-kazahstane-povyisyat-zarplatyi-v-2-raza-376685/) (accessed April 26, 2020).

31 “Strategicheskii plan ministerstva obrazovaniia i nauki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2011–2016 gody,” 04.02.2016, available at <http://control.edu.gov.kz/ru/strategicheskii-plan-mon-rk-na-2014–2018-gody> (accessed February 15, 2018).

32 Sange, *Podushevoe finansirovanie: za i protiv*, Astana: Sange, 2013, p. 21, Available at <http://sange.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FinancePerCapita2013.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2018).

33 Ibid.

34 Currently the rate is 433 tenge per one dollar.

35 “Podushevoe finansirovanie v shkolakh. Reshit-li ono problemy srednego obrazovaniia?”, available at <https://informuro.kz/cards/podushevoe-finansirovanie-v-shkolah-reshit-li-ono-problemy-srednego-obrazovaniya.html> (accessed last April, 28, 2020).

depending on a number of factors, including the number of schoolchildren, type of the educational program, location of a school, and school facilities.<sup>36</sup>

One of the peculiarities of the Kazakhstani education system is thus an unequal distribution of resources across regions, which is a result of fiscal decentralization. Despite the fact that the system of education is largely centralized, there is some degree of fiscal decentralization of public expenditures. Local governments have increased their role in the distribution of resources. Currently, 70% of education spending comes from local budgets. *Akims* (local governors) decide on their own how much money to allocate for education in their region. One of the interviewees noted,

During the Soviet period, schools had a centralized budget and accounting but with the economic crisis they opened their own accounts on which sponsors or parents made contributions. But many directors used those funds for their personal benefits. Sometime later, it was decided to prohibit those accounts.<sup>37</sup>

Fiscal decentralization undertaken in the 1990s weakened the oversight of school budget spending from central authorities. The underinvestment in education has also affected school facilities. The number of schools decreased over the last decade, and currently there are 7,511 secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Because of the shortage of schools, classrooms, and human resources, children have to study in two or three shifts. Overall, in the 1990s, more than 50% of schools functioned on two or three shifts. In 2016, still 86 schools operated on three shifts with 11,200 children. The budget cuts for schools also affected free school lunches for children. For instance, in 2014–2015, 700,000 children had free school meals. In 2015–2016 the number was reduced to 435,000 and then to 300,000 in 2016–2017. Nowadays, schools tend to provide free meals only to children from socially vulnerable groups of the population, i.e. those who have the right to targeted state social support, mostly families with income lower than the minimum living standard, orphans, and children chosen by a collegial school council.<sup>38</sup>

Poor financial support has led to the deterioration of the quality of education. The OECD report stated, “Underinvestment in the school system can also result in educational inequalities, as disadvantaged areas or schools receive

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36 Ibid.

37 Personal interview with Saule, November, 30, 2016.

38 “Besplatnoe pitanie v shkolakh: deshevo, serdito, skandal’no i nevkusno,” May 16, 2017, available at <https://informburo.kz/stati/besplatnoe-pitanie-v-shkolah-dyoshevo-serdito-skandalno-i-nevkusno-.html> (accessed March 9, 2018).

scarcer resources.”<sup>39</sup> The next section deals with the issues of quality of education and equity of access to education in Kazakhstan.

### 3 Quality of the Secondary Education

In the rating on global competition, Kazakhstan occupied the 67th place in terms of quality of education in 2015–2016. There is a significant disparity in quality of education across rural versus urban areas and private versus public schools. Some schools, such as nis, located in urban areas, have excellent resources and laboratories and employ instructors from the United States and Europe. However, the level of education provided in other regional cities can be lower than in the two major cities, Almaty and Astana.

One of the big problems of education in Kazakhstan is the quality of education in rural areas. Over 7,576 schools in the country, 6,032 are located in rural areas; 4,139 or 68.6% of them are “ungraded,” characterized by a low number of schoolchildren in classes, combined classes, and multi-subject teaching. Most ungraded schools are located in Northern Kazakhstan (representing 88.1% of all schools), Akmola (81%), Kostanay (77.5%), and Pavlodar (76.5%). During the last 15 years, the number of ungraded schools has increased, which can be explained by a high migration of the population to big cities and out of the country. As a result, every fourth teacher works and every sixth student studies in an ungraded school. Their material and technical basis is rather poor. For instance, 948 schools lack food courts or canteens; 822 do not have gyms; 786 require renovations. The lack of special laboratories, modern furniture, technical and sport equipment, and electronic resources does not create conditions for high-quality education.<sup>40</sup> For instance, only 11.5% of ungraded schools have access to Internet and only 28% of them have some interactive equipment.<sup>41</sup>

Such conditions have a negative impact on students’ learning. According to the PISA survey conducted in 2018 among 15-year-old teenagers, Kazakhstani school students were below the OECD average across a number of metrics.<sup>42</sup> They occupied the 53rd place in mathematics (obtaining 423 points), 69th place

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39 OECD Reviews of School Resources: Kazakhstan. 2015. OECD and the World Bank group, p. 56, available at [http://www.OECD.org/edu/school/OECD%20School%20Resources%20Review\\_Kazakhstan\\_FINAL\\_CRC\\_with%20cover.pdf](http://www.OECD.org/edu/school/OECD%20School%20Resources%20Review_Kazakhstan_FINAL_CRC_with%20cover.pdf) (accessed October 10, 2016).

40 State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, available at <https://strategy2050.kz/en/page/gosprog2/> (accessed March 5, 2018).

41 Ibid.

42 The average scores for the OECD countries are 487 points in reading, 489 points in math, and 489 points in science.

in reading (387 points), and 68th place in science (397 points).<sup>43</sup> These results were lower than those received in 2015. The Minister of Education justified the deterioration in the results by reference to students' first experience taking the PISA tests on computers.<sup>44</sup> In any case, the level of knowledge of Kazakhstani schoolchildren is lower than that of school students in the other OECD countries.

Schoolchildren from rural areas show consistently lower results on tests. For instance, the grade point average of students from rural schools is 9.4 points lower than that of students in urban areas.<sup>45</sup> The difference in math between rural and urban students is 25 points. In 2015, the graduates of urban schools received 7.35 points more than the graduate of rural schools.<sup>46</sup> One of the respondents from a rural area said, "There are no good teachers for mathematics, physics, and English language. We do not see computers and there is no Internet. We even cannot hire a tutor".<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there is a shortage of teachers in rural areas.<sup>48</sup> To retain young specialists in rural schools, the government provides specific financial support: the university graduates who go to work in rural areas for a minimum of five years receive startup money (121,170 tenge) and credits (865,500 tenge).<sup>49</sup> But still, the Aktobe region, there was a lack of more than 200 teachers of mathematics and Russian language and literature, as well as teachers of elementary education.

One of the possible solutions, according to education workers, is to restructure ungraded schools. In the Akmola region, 118 schools will be restructured by 2020. Twenty-two schools will be reorganized to basic schools and 25 basic schools will be changed to elementary ones. Dariga Nazarbayeva, Majilis Deputy and eldest daughter of the first President, said that "the problem should be resolved radically... it is necessary to restore boarding schools. Parents should

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43 pisa report 2018, Available at [https://www.OECD.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_KAZ.pdf](https://www.OECD.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_KAZ.pdf) (accessed April 20, 2020).

44 R. Medelbek, "Kazakhstanskie shkolniki pokazali rezul'taty nizhe srednikh: Pochemu?," available at <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-at-the-pisa-ranking/30306602.html> (accessed April 18, 2020).

45 Aslan Sarinzhypov, "Innovatsionnaia strategiia obrazovaniia – fakt razvitiia gosudarstva, obshchestva, lichnosti," *Obrzovanie* 3, no. 70 (2014): 7–14.

46 Zh Musina, "Po shkolam sudiat o strane: Kak podniat' sel'skoe obrazovanie do urovnia gorodskogo?," *Sovremennoe obrazovanie* 3, no. 99 (2015): 30–32.

47 Sange Report, p. 29.

48 Zh Musina, "Po shkolam sudiat o strane," p. 31.

49 D. Sazhko "S diplomom v selo: Kak deistvuet eta dolgosrochnaia gosudarstvennaia programma," *Sovremennoe obrazovanie*, 3, no. 99 (2016): 83–86.

think about the future of their children and what knowledge they will gain and how they find their place in life.”<sup>50</sup>

According to school students who participated in a survey,<sup>51</sup> quality education is not accessible for children from poor families (43%), dysfunctional families (11%), remote villages (8%); children with health problems and disability (15%); or homeless children (5%), migrants (4%), and those who do not have housing and registration (*propiska*). The respondents believe that the poor level of education does not provide opportunities to enter into a good university. The answers varied: for example, “without a tutor, it is hard to receive good knowledge,” “there is a shortage of teachers, one instructor teaches two subjects,” “lacks of qualified teachers,” and “the quality of education in rural areas is not of the same level as in urban areas.”<sup>52</sup>

The low prestige and status of a teacher is one of the factors that also influences the quality of education. The Deputy Minister of Education, Askhat Aimagambetov, claimed that extracurricular activities negatively affect the quality and efficiency of a teacher’s work. He said,

This includes teachers’ participation in the subscription campaign [of newspapers] and the conduction of mass events such as opening of the monuments, preparation for the New Year, and others. In addition, the lack of social protection of teachers including a low access to kindergarten and housing, absence of remuneration for methodical, research and project activities lead to the decline of the prestige of the profession and to the outflow both among highly qualified and young specialists.

Poor remuneration and lack of respect and financial support reflect a low level of prestige of the profession. No true data exist about the outflow of professional cadres nor the status of a teacher in society. The lack of such data does not allow for a complete picture about the current situation, problems, and the reasons for outflow. To raise the status of the profession, in 2019 President K.

50 Nina Mitchinova, “Malokomplektnye shkoly: vchera, segodnia, zavtra,” available at <http://apgazeta.kz/2014/01/10/malokomplektnye-shkoly-vchera-segodnya-zavtra/> (accessed March 3, 2018).

51 The experts determined several vulnerable groups of children such as children with limited abilities, children living in remote rural areas or in locations with weak infrastructure, children from dysfunctional family, children with deviant behavior, children from a single-parent family, children of Oralmans, migrants and refugees.

52 Sange, *Sobludenie prav i zakonnykh interesov detei v organizatsiakh obrazovaniia* (Astana: Sange 2010), p. 40. available at <http://sange.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RightsinEdu2006.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2018).

Tokayev signed a new law on the status of pedagogues, according to which the workload of teachers will be reduced, particularly that type of work which is unrelated to teaching. The vacation period will be increased up to 56 days per year, and the social package will include housing, healthcare payments, financial support for those in rural areas, and so on.<sup>53</sup>

As this section shows, various factors influence the quality of education. The government has to make significant changes in the system to raise the quality of education, including the allocation of larger resources and the reduction of informal payments.

#### 4 Informal Payments in the Education Sector

Underinvestment in the public sector has spurred informal payments, especially in the field of secondary education. In the 1990s parents had to support schools, purchasing everything from school furniture to blackboard chalk. Although the financial situation has improved over the last decade and the government spends much more money on education, schools still experience shortages of resources. As mentioned above, the lion's share of public resources goes to salaries rather than to school equipment. According to the head of the non-governmental organization Crisis Centers Union, Zulfia Baisakova, "Requisitions in schools flourish due to the inadequate budget allocation."<sup>54</sup> Non-transparency of budget expenditures in schools also supports informal exchanges. Many school directors said that there is no access to the budget information for parents and other members of the public. It is not known how the budget is spent. The system of purchasing goods, works, and services in schools is non-transparent.<sup>55</sup> School directors have only general information about the resources allocated for local budgets, but they do not know about the budget in a neighboring school.

The underinvestment of secondary schools and the shortage of resources for renovations and maintenance of equipment and facilities force school administrators and teachers to find solutions. One of them is informal payments from school directors, teachers, and parents. Directors and teachers often personally contribute about 20,000–30,000 tenge per month. This money usually goes to cover phone calls related to work, school events and the purchase of

53 "Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan 'O statute pedagoga,'" available at [https://online.zakon.kz/m/document/?doc\\_id=32091648#sub\\_id=40000](https://online.zakon.kz/m/document/?doc_id=32091648#sub_id=40000), accessed on April 25, 2020).

54 "Pochemu protsvetaiut," 2015.

55 Sange, *Podushevoe finansirovanie: za i protiv*, p. 28–29, available at <http://sange.kz/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FinancePerCapita2013.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2018).

gifts for students, subscriptions to newspapers and journals, and many other needs.<sup>56</sup> One director of a rural school noted, “We bought cheap chairs, paint, everything in a minimal quantity. Allocated resources do not cover the demands of the schools. It is explained by the shortage of budget resources.”<sup>57</sup> Another director mentioned, “It is very difficult to ask for the increase of budget on Article 139. To increase funds, it is necessary to write a letter to the Department of Education. If there is money in the budget, then they can give us a small amount. In general we refuse, because there is no money.”<sup>58</sup> “In 2009 we received a tiny amount to buy furniture; we could change furniture only in three classrooms, for other classrooms there was no money and when we will get it is unknown.”<sup>59</sup>

Parents of schoolchildren thus became an important source of extra resources for school budgets. In each school, parental committees collect money. The money from those funds can be distributed to cover additional lessons, salaries for cleaning personnel and school guards, textbooks, curtains, window blinds, interactive boards, and many other things. In interviews, some parents mentioned that they give 5,000 tenge/month to a school fund. Total informal payments might amount to 45,000 tenge per year. Every month, parents can collect about 30,000 or more to help teachers financially.<sup>60</sup>

A high school director noted that if there are no voluntary contributions from parents, then there will be no security guards because the state budget does not make provisions for their salaries.<sup>61</sup> In addition, without voluntary contributions, schoolchildren will not be able to participate in various scientific projects because there will be no transportation to deliver their models to the exhibition. “We will not be able to decorate the school for the New Year’s holiday, although we are demanded to do so... It might cost 200,000–300,000 tenge. Also, we will not plant flowers in the flowerbeds in spring.”<sup>62</sup> This is only part of what is done due to voluntary parental contributions.

Although many parents recognize that schools are underfunded and require additional resources, some are unhappy with the existing situation. If a family

56 *Podushevoe finansirovanie*, 2013, p. 28.

57 Ibid.

58 139 items specifies purchasing “other goods.” Perechen spetsifikatsii ekonomicheskoi klssifikatsii raskhodov. Utdverzhde prikazom MF RK ot 19 dekabrya 2008 goda, #588. List of specifications of Economic classification of expenditures. Confirmed by the decree of the MF of RK from December 19, 2008, #588.

59 *Podushevoe finansirovanie*, 2013, p. 29.

60 Personal communication, April 12, 2017.

61 “Bez dobrovol’nykh vzosnov ucheniki ostanutsia bez okhrany,” available at <http://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/33434/bez-dobrovolnyh-vzosnov-ucheniki-ostanutsya-bez-ohrany.html> (accessed March 13, 2018).

62 Ibid.

is not better off and has three children, then paying 30,000–45,000 tenge per child might be quite a burden. The Ministry of Education and Science claims that there is no obligation to contribute money to school budgets. In case school directors or teachers extort money from parents, then the latter could leave complaints on the website of the local government (*akimat*) or call the Department of Education. According to Lyzzat Zhylkybayeva, the deputy head of the Education Department of Almaty, the issue of informal payments is not on the agenda of the administration. She claims the number of complaints from parents regarding the collection of money “has been reduced by 2–3 times.”<sup>63</sup>

The government tries to resolve the issue of informal payments by formalizing the process of parental payments. For this purpose, it established in 2017 Councils of Trustees in 742 schools—more than 10% of all schools in the country. According to the deputy director of the pre-primary and secondary education of the Ministry of Education, Zeinep Maksutova,

Now the Ministry is trying to root out informal payments in schools and legalize sponsors’ support so that those charitable and voluntary contributions received by schools could be spent exclusively on the needs of schools and not to be put in someone’s pockets... Nobody has the right to demand parents to donate money. Informal payments (or requisitions) should be stopped and we should take necessary measures now.<sup>64</sup>

Councils of Trustees participate in the distribution of financial resources given to schools as sponsorships and make decisions about the purposes for which the money will be spent. They also help to make the budget for a school. The head of each school is accountable to the Council of Trustees in terms of quality of education and distribution of charitable assistance.<sup>65</sup> Any sponsorship money goes to a school account or bank account. The sponsorship money or charity donations can be used for (1) social support of school students, (2) improvement of the material and technical facilities of the educational institution, (3) development of sport activities and support of talented children, and (4) spending on the educational processes above the standard educational requirements. Schools have to report publicly on how they spend sponsorship

63 [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/li-sobirat-dengi-shkolah-kantstovaryi-podarok-uchitelyu-327390/](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/li-sobirat-dengi-shkolah-kantstovaryi-podarok-uchitelyu-327390/).

64 K. Klemenkova, “Kak pobory v kazakhstanskikh shkolakh perevodiat na zakonnye relsy,” available at <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/society/20170816/3004472/kak-pobory-v-kazakhstanskikh-shkolakh-perevodiyat-na-zakonnye-relsy.html> (accessed March 3, 2018).

65 “Ob utverzhenii tipovykh pravil organizatsii raboty Popechitel’skogo soveta i poriadok ego izbraniia v organizatsiakh obrazovaniia,” June 27, 2017. No355, accessed April 20, 2020, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo\\_respubliki\\_kazahstan\\_premier\\_ministr\\_rk/obpazovanie/id-V1700015584/](https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo_respubliki_kazahstan_premier_ministr_rk/obpazovanie/id-V1700015584/).

resources.<sup>66</sup> Councils of Trustees oversee the receipt of payments and are accountable to parents for all expenditures.<sup>67</sup> However, not all parents believe that Councils of Trustees can help to reduce the collection of money. One of the activists fighting against informal payments, Akmaral Omralinova, declared,

I was against the Councils of Trustees... and suggested to get rid of parental committees in order not to offer anything else. If there is a group of people in-between the school administration and parents, then this group gathers money. The motto “This is for our children” is striking. Some parents support donations at school meetings but, in fact, they are against it...<sup>68</sup>

The creation of Councils of Trustees makes the collection of money more transparent and legal, but it does not resolve the issue of informal payments completely. Parental committees are still in place along with Councils of Trustees. The recommendation to eliminate parental committees was discussed widely in the public sphere. However, many parents and teachers supported the idea that parental committees are an important link between teachers, on the one hand, and school students and their parents, on the other. One of the interviewees mentioned,

Parental committees are important because they are responsible for extracurricular activities; they organize leisure times for our children, conduct various cultural events, and of course serve as a liaison between a teacher and all parents. Councils of Trustees have meetings two or three times per year and usually resolve big issues, while parental committees work all year round and deals with various issues on a daily basis.<sup>69</sup>

In the Law on Education, adopted in 2007, Article 49 states that parents have the right to take part in the management of schools through parental committees.<sup>70</sup> School directors are accountable both to parental committees and Councils of Trustees regarding the distribution of money received from sponsorship or charities.

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66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 “Ne roditeli a popechiteli: pobory v shkolakh Kazakhstana ne zakonchatsia,” available at <https://informburo.kz/stati/ne-roditeli-a-popechiteli-pobory-v-shkolah-kazahstana-ne-zakonchatsya.html>, (accessed March 10, 2018).

69 Anuar S., Personal communication, Almaty, March, 2020.

70 “Zakon ob obrazovanii,” available at [https://kodeksy-kz.com/ka/ob\\_obrazovanii/49.htm](https://kodeksy-kz.com/ka/ob_obrazovanii/49.htm), accessed on April 20, 2020.

To reduce informal payments and provide incentives, the authorities have also changed the system of financial support for schools. The distribution of resources will now depend on the number of schoolchildren enrolled. Hence, the number of schoolchildren determines how much a school can receive from the state budget. According to Bibigul Assylova, Vice Minister of Education and Science, due to public expenditures per capita in schools, the level of informal payments has decreased by 30–40%. “Per capita spending has been introduced in Almaty, Nur-Sultan, and Shymkent. From September 2020 all city schools will have public expenditures per capita.”<sup>71</sup> Another measure to fight informal payments has been the decree that prohibits any collection of money from parents. “In Kazakhstan, those teachers who collect money from schoolchildren can be fired.”<sup>72</sup>

However, despite the reforms and the reduction in the quantity of informal payments, many parents continue to make informal payments to the school budget for classroom renovations, or to buy theater tickets for children, diaries, etc. The website of the Department of Education in Almaty has a number of anonymous statements from parents about the ongoing informal payments. Some complained that they had to give 10,000 tenge to the school fund. Another parent mentioned informal payments for testing as well as providing material assistance, while others talked about contribution to the conduction of Olympiads or gifts to teachers or school director.<sup>73</sup> “We bought desks, blinds and of course stationery. We also gave 10,000 tenge and this is only the beginning [of the year]” wrote one of the anonymous.<sup>74</sup> Another example is an anonymous survey that was conducted in the Zhambyl region among teachers and parents. A total of 699 teachers from 21 educational organizations and 315 parents participated in the survey. As a result, 15.7% of respondents admitted that informal payments are a common phenomenon in their schools.<sup>75</sup> Specifically, the respondents recognized that almost every month they have to collect 2,000–3,000 tenge for various purposes including the organizing of school fairs, renovation

71 “Vnedrenie podushevogo finansirovaniia povlialo na pobory v shkolakh – mon,” available at [https://total.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo\\_sobitiya/vnedrenie\\_podushevogo\\_finansirovaniya\\_povliyalo\\_na\\_pobori\\_v\\_shkolakh\\_mon\\_date\\_2020\\_01\\_06\\_18\\_49\\_38](https://total.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo_sobitiya/vnedrenie_podushevogo_finansirovaniya_povliyalo_na_pobori_v_shkolakh_mon_date_2020_01_06_18_49_38) (accessed on April 28, 2020).

72 Anar Mustafina, “Poroby v shkolakh - eto koleso sansary- KazSMI,” available at <https://365info.kz/2019/04/pobory-v-shkolah-eto-koleso-sansary-kazsmihttps://365info.kz/2019/04/pobory-v-shkolah-eto-koleso-sansary-kazsmi>, accessed 20 April, 2020.

73 Department of Education of Almaty, Responses, available at <https://orgi.biz/org192362>, accessed April 25, 2020.

74 Ibid.

75 Orshabekov, K, “Pedagogi iz Taraza priznali fakty korruptsii v shkolakh,” available at <https://kursiv.kz/news/obschestvo/2019-05/pedagogi-taraza-priznali-fakty-korruptcii-v-shkolakh>, accessed April 28, 2020.

work, gifts to the schools administration, and other things. Some respondents admitted that they had to bribe in order to obtain the job in a school.<sup>76</sup>

The new experiment with per capita spending has been introduced only in schools of the three major cities, while all other schools receive funding based on the old scheme. With the current crisis experienced due to Covid-19, it is not clear whether the government will be able to make public spending per capita more equitable across all schools in Kazakhstan. Thus informal parental payments still take place, albeit not to the same degree as before.

#### 4.1 *School Attestation and Informal Payments*

Another channel of informal payments in secondary education is school attestation, which was launched in 2012. Before that, control over quality of education was exercised by local governments—which often resulted in conflicts of interest, declines of quality of education, and growing disparities across regions. S. Israliyev, the head of the Committee on Quality Control, noted, “Before local executive bodies conducted attestation, the result was 99.7%. At the moment [2013], we checked 1,117 schools and 37% of them did not go through the attestation. Our control department applies minimal criteria for quality evaluation.”<sup>77</sup> According to the Committee, 205 schools do not have licenses, and 2,000 teachers do not have pedagogical education. More than 30% of schools in Southern Kazakhstan do not meet the requirements in terms of qualification, level of students’ knowledge, and material resources.

To go through the attestation process conducted by the Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Education, school administration and teachers start preparation a minimum of three months before the date. Teachers teach extra-lessons to students free of charge to make sure that they can pass the attestation. The fear of punishment, necessity to prepare a big volume of documents, and distrust put teachers at a disadvantage.<sup>78</sup> Since there are no common criteria toward the attestation documents, the members of the Committee can refer to their own experience, which might lead to corrupt actions. In 2016, the Deputy Prime Minister declared the need to introduce measures to reduce corruption risks that take place during school attestation. A high level of corruption happens due to the lack of clear criteria regarding who can be a member

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76 Ibid.

77 “Kazakhstanskije shkoly ne proshedshije attestatsiiu, v techenie polgoda mogut ispraviti situatsiiu,” available at [https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/kazakhstanskije\\_shkoli\\_ne\\_proshedshije\\_attestatsiiu\\_v\\_techenie\\_polgoda\\_mogut\\_ispraviti\\_situatsiiu\\_video](https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/kazakhstanskije_shkoli_ne_proshedshije_attestatsiiu_v_techenie_polgoda_mogut_ispraviti_situatsiiu_video) (accessed March 3 2018).

78 Aygerim Kopeyeva, “Mify i pravda o gosattestatsii shkol v Kazakhstane,” available at <https://factcheck.kz/glavnoe/mify-i-pravda-o-gosattestatsii-shkol-v-kazaxstane/> (accessed on March 3, 2018).

of the attestation commission and of a clear-cut division of responsibilities and ethical rules of conduct. As a result, schools seek to show themselves from the best side and are mostly oriented toward meeting the indicators.<sup>79</sup>

To go through attestation, often school directors and teachers collect money to accommodate the commission. The paradox is that there might be up to 20 different inspections and control commissions per year. Besides commissions from the Quality Assurance Department, other inspections check schools including labor, financial, sanitary, epidemiological, and fire inspections. According to Sveta Iskakova, a teacher, the administration asked teachers to give 30,000 tenge to go through the attestation.<sup>80</sup> One of the directors who was accused of money collection for the attestation commission said,

This state of affairs has existed for a long time. Indeed, I admit that I asked to collect money for the commission to set the table for the attestation commission. Members of the commission come from different places such as Suzak or Kyzygurt. They do not have places to stay. They stay here for three–four days sometimes during the entire week, that’s why we must treat them with lunch every day.<sup>81</sup>

School directors and teachers have become hostages of the attestation commissions and control on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science. To change the situation, in 2016 new rules and criteria regarding the composition of the commission, standards for evaluation of teachers, and assignments to higher ranks, have been introduced. In 2018, the government decided to conduct the attestation of teachers in electronic format. The Ministry noted, “We believe that digitalization will play a big role in fighting corruption in the education system. Attestation of teachers and the hiring process will be made electronically.”<sup>82</sup> This should help to further decrease informal payments in secondary education in Kazakhstan.

79 The decree of the Minister of Education and Science of the RK “On rules and conditions of the conduction of attestation of pedagogical workers and individuals working in educational organizations, implementing general education curricula of pre-school, primary, basic secondary, general secondary and educational programs of the technical and professional, post-secondary education and other civil servants working in the sphere of education and science,” available at [https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo\\_respubliki\\_kazakhstan\\_premier\\_ministr\\_rk/obpazovanie/id-V1600013317/](https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo_respubliki_kazakhstan_premier_ministr_rk/obpazovanie/id-V1600013317/), <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/turkestan-shkola-zhaloby-na-pobory/28047029.html> (accessed March 13, 2018).

80 Dilara Isa, “Direktor priznaet, chto sobirala den’gi s uchitelei,” October 2016, available at <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/turkestan-shkola-zhaloby-na-pobory/28047029.html>.

81 Ibid.

82 Arsen Askarov, “Attestatsiiu i priem na rabotu uchitelei avtomatiziruiut,” available at <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/71990/attestatsiyu-i-priem-na-rabotu-uchiteley-avtomatiziruyut.html> (accessed on 28 April, 2020).

## 5 Conclusion

This study shows that although the level of informal payments has been decreased significantly due to the reforms, they continue to exist in the educational system of Kazakhstan. In the last few years, government authorities have introduced some measures such as Councils of Trustees, per capita spending in schools, and open school budget accounts. However, the root cause of informal payments—the ongoing underinvestment in secondary education—has not yet been removed completely. The evidence suggests that without informal payments it would be hard for a school to function effectively. On one hand, the authorities recognize the importance of informal payments for schools to survive; on the other hand, the officials seek to stop this ‘illegal’ informal practice. Since the government does not plan to increase the budget for education, the shortage of financial resources in schools will remain. As a result, school directors, teachers, and parents have to deal with that issue on their own.

Another channel of informal payments is the attestation of teachers and schools by the Ministry of Science and Education. Various attestation commissions created unhealthy atmospheres in schools and served as a source of corrupt actions. However, recent changes, such as the digitalization of many procedures including the attestation of teachers, might reduce informal payments in schools. On the other hand, the ongoing informal payments from parents in secondary education serve as an extra income for public schools, helping to improve facilities and create learning opportunities for children. All in all, the government should make more efforts to increase investments in the education system and eliminate informal payments, since quality education defines human capital and thus, the future of Kazakhstan.

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