They will get there! Studies on educational performance of immigrant youth in the Netherlands

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The educational performance of youth from immigrant descent has been a key subject in political and public debate over the past decades. Typically, these debates focus on underrepresentation in academic tracks in secondary school, and dropout. The steady increase, however, in enrollments in academic secondary levels among youth from immigrant descent, seems almost overshadowed by the emphasis on problematic school careers. This thesis shows that the average access to higher secondary tracks is slightly lower in largely stratified neighborhoods. Further research into three zip code areas with persistent socioeconomic challenges, however, shows that pupils from Moroccan descent have better chances to complete secondary school, when they do not switch schools. Furthermore, we found that up to 90% of pupils in the four major Dutch cities choose another school than the school nearest to their home. While native Dutch pupils on average prefer a school with a lower percentage of migrant pupils, pupils from immigrant descent prefer a school with a higher percentage of migrant pupils than is the case at the nearest school. For pupils from immigrant descent, chances for upward mobility to a higher track increase slightly, but significantly, with a lower distance between home and school. Finally, we found that relevant and manageably existing scientific research, can adequately be matched with key questions of diverse schools, and support these schools in the closing of the achievement gap.

Liesbeth van Welie graduated in Biology from Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands), with a specialization in Aquatic Ecology. She started her career as a teacher in Biology and was a few years later appointed as Principal of an innovative newly-founded school for secondary education. Her second appointment as Principal was at a diverse inner-city school in Amsterdam. Next, she worked as advisor to the Board of the University of Amsterdam, and participated in several international networks in the field of quality assessment of higher education, internationalization and organizational change. Her next step was advisor to the Board of Maastricht University, followed by two years as senior consultant at a consultancy firm. For several years she held the position of Chief Inspector of secondary and higher education, where after she was asked to develop a new directorate for the enhancement of evidence/information based policymaking at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. She worked on this doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam.