



# Merit as an Attitude: Chilean School Communities' Repertoires in Chile and the Perception of the "Good Student" in a Post-pandemic Scenario

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## Abstract

Due to its commodification policies, the Chilean educational system is a paradigmatic case for study. It comprises private subsidies, achievement incentives, competition, selection, and segregation. After years of student and social protests, the 2015 Inclusion Law mandated that publicly funded schools accept all admitted students. Critics argue this restricts family choice and undermines merit. The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened inequalities, exposing contradictions in a merit-based system. This article examines how meritocratic ideals emerged post-pandemic in parents' and teachers' perceptions of school communities within a neoliberal educational model promoting meritocratic values alongside inclusive policies. Based on 32 interviews with parents and teachers from two private and two publicly funded schools in Santiago, findings show meritocracy is deeply entrenched, even in public education. The "meritorious student" is defined beyond academics, encompassing behavior, responsibility, and respect—traits also expected of families. The importance of effort as a mechanism for improvement permeates the notion of the "good student", thereby overshadowing the importance of inclusive educational environments, as merit also becomes relativised by the post-pandemic scenario. The deep educational inequalities and behavioural problems force teachers and parents to focus on and solve different aspects rather than academic achievements. Merit, as understood by educational communities, is perceived as a process and an attitude intertwined with social opportunities.

**Keywords** Merit · Attitude · Effort · Schools · COVID-19 pandemic

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