

## Korea and Finland top OECD's latest PISA survey of education performance

Korea and Finland top the OECD's latest PISA survey of reading literacy among 15-year olds, which for the first time tested students' ability to manage digital information.

The survey, based on two-hour tests of a half million students in more than 70 economies, also tested mathematics and science. The results for 65 economies are being released today.

The next strongest performances were from Hong Kong-China, Singapore, Canada, New Zealand and Japan.

The province of Shanghai, China, took part for the first time and scored higher in reading than any country. It also topped the table in maths and science. More than one-quarter of Shanghai's 15-year-olds demonstrated advanced mathematical thinking skills to solve complex problems, compared to an OECD average of just 3%.

"Better educational outcomes are a strong predictor for future economic growth," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "While national income and educational achievement are still related, PISA shows that two countries with similar levels of prosperity can produce very different results. This shows that an image of a world divided neatly into rich and well-educated countries and poor and badly-educated countries is now out of date."

Some OECD countries saw strong gains in reading literacy, most notably Chile, Israel and Poland, but also Portugal, Korea, Hungary and Germany. In mathematics, Mexico, Turkey, Greece, Portugal, Italy and Germany saw rapid improvements. In science, Turkey, Portugal, Korea, Italy, Norway, the US and Poland showed the biggest improvements.

The OECD studied differing results between girls and boys, as well as the influence of class size, teacher pay and the degree of autonomy schools have in allocating resources. Findings include:

- Girls read better than boys in every country, by an average of 39 points, the equivalent to one year of schooling. The gender gap has not improved in any country since 2000, and widened in France, Israel, Korea, Portugal and Sweden. This is mirrored in a decline of boy's enjoyment of reading and their engagement with reading in their leisure time.
- The best school systems were the most equitable - students do well regardless of their socio-economic background. But schools that select students based on ability early show the greatest differences in performance by socio-economic background.
- High performing school systems tend to prioritise teacher pay over smaller class sizes.
- Countries where students repeat grades more often tend to have worse results overall, with the widest gaps between children from poor and better-off families. Making students repeat years is most common in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain.
- High performing systems allow schools to design curricula and establish assessment policies but don't necessarily allow competition for students.
- Schools with good discipline and better student-teacher relations achieve better reading results.

- Public and private schools achieve similar results, after taking account of their home backgrounds.
- Combining local autonomy and effective accountability seems to produce the best results.
- The percentage of students who said they read for pleasure dropped from 69% in 2000 to 64% in 2009.

The OECD's PISA aims to help countries see how their school systems match up globally with regard to their quality, equity and efficiency. The best performing education systems show what others can aspire to, as well as inspire national efforts to help students to learn better, teachers to teach better, and school systems to become more effective.

In 2011, as part of the deliverables of the OECD's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the organisation will launch two new programmes to help countries build, maintain and improve the skills of their citizens for tomorrow's world. The first results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and the OECD Skills Strategy will be released in 2013.

Journalists can obtain a copy of the reports from the [OECD Media Division](#) (tel. + 33 1 45 24 97 00)

For further information, journalists should contact [Andreas Schleicher](#) from the OECD's Education Directorate.

More information, including summaries, country notes and data, are available at [www.oecd.org/edu/pisa](http://www.oecd.org/edu/pisa)