

What is PISA?

- More than 60 countries have taken part in PISA since it began in 2000, accounting for more than 90% of the world economy.
- In the most recent PISA round, in 2006, more than 400 000 randomly selected students took part, representing about 20 million 15-year-olds in the schools of the participating countries.
- PISA assessments are held every three years, and the next will be in 2009; each round assesses students in reading, mathematics and science, with a special focus on one of those subjects in each round.

Introduction

PISA seeks to measure how well students who are nearing the end of compulsory education are prepared to meet the challenges of today's knowledge societies – what PISA refers to as “literacy”. The aim of the assessment is not to judge the extent to which students have mastered a specific school curriculum. Rather, it focuses on young people's ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

The tests involve a sample of 15-year-old students in each country, who complete pencil-and-paper measuring reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. Students also fill in questionnaires about themselves, which cover a range of questions, including their attitudes to learning and their family background, while their principals complete questionnaires about their schools.

Key features of PISA

Policy orientation: PISA is designed to provide governments with the data they need to draw policy lessons.

“Literacy” concept: PISA is concerned with the capacity of students to apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas and to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they pose, solve and interpret problems in a variety of situations.

Relevance to lifelong learning: PISA goes beyond assessing students' curricular competencies to report on their motivation to learn, their beliefs about themselves and their learning strategies.

Regularity: PISA's three-yearly cycle means countries can monitor their progress in meeting key learning objectives.

Wider context: PISA is contextualised within the wider system of OECD education indicators.

Breadth: PISA assessments cover all 30 OECD countries and a large number of other partner countries and economies.

How PISA reports results

Score points: Once students have completed the assessments, their results are processed to produce a score point average and ranking for their country. For example, in the PISA 2006 round, the top ranking country, Finland, had a science score of 563, while at the other end of the scale the partner country Kyrgyzstan had a score of 322. (Note, however, that because the students who take part in PISA represent only a sample of 15-year-olds in each country, each country's ranking can be determined only with a 95% likelihood.)

Proficiency levels: The score-point scale is further divided into a number of proficiency levels, six in science and mathematics and five in reading in the 2006 PISA round. For example, a student with a score of about 708 was ranked at the highest level – Level 6 – in science; a student with a score of about 335 was ranked at Level 1, the lowest level.

Attaining a certain level indicates that a student has certain proficiencies. For example, students attaining Level 6 in science were described as being able to “consistently identify, explain and apply scientific knowledge and knowledge about science in a variety of complex life situations”; by contrast students at Level 1 were described as having “such a limited scientific knowledge that it can only be applied to a few, familiar situations”.

Definitions for this section

Achievement scores: All results reported in this section are based on assessments administered as part of the PISA 2006 round undertaken by the OECD.

Students: The term “students” refers to 15-year-olds enrolled in an educational institution at secondary level, regardless of the grade level or type of institution in which they were enrolled and regardless of whether they attended school full-time or part-time.

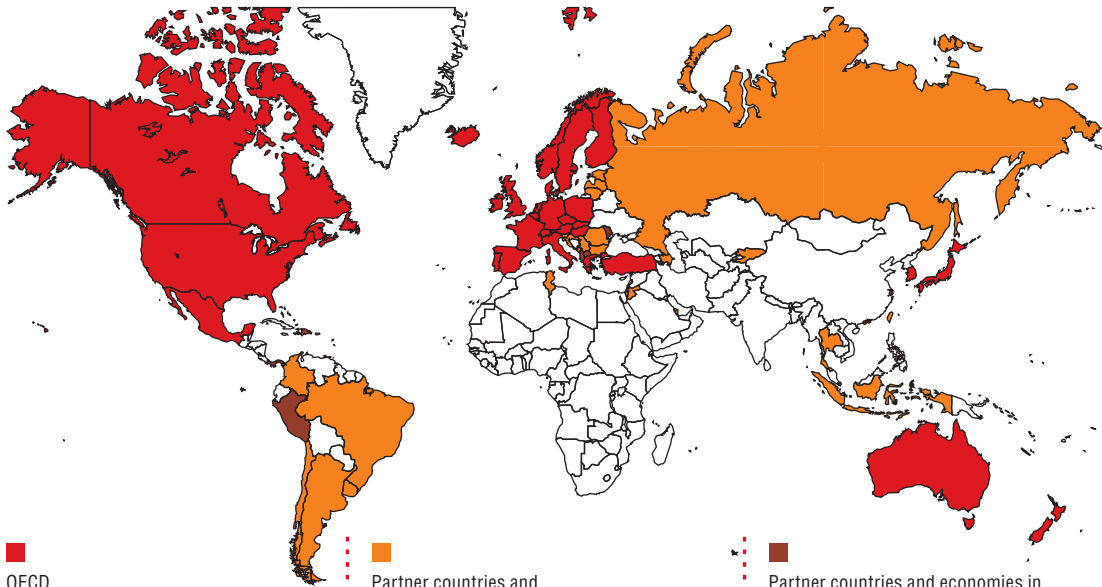
Going further

To find out more about PISA, visit www.pisa.oecd.org.

Further reading from OECD

PISA 2006: *Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World*, Vol. 1: Analysis (2007).

A map of PISA countries and economies



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OECD
countries

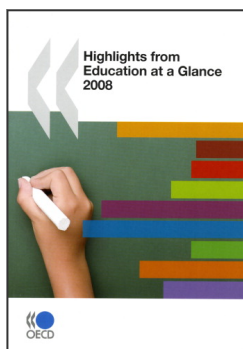
- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Canada
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Korea
- Luxembourg
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Slovak Republic
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- United Kingdom
- United States

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Partner countries and
economies in PISA 2006

- Argentina
- Azerbaijan
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Chile
- Colombia
- Croatia
- Estonia
- Hong Kong-China
- Indonesia
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Macao-China
- Montenegro
- Qatar
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Serbia
- Slovenia
- Chinese Taipei
- Thailand
- Tunisia
- Uruguay

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Partner countries and economies in
previous PISA surveys or in PISA 2009

- Albania
- Shanghai-China
- Dominican Republic
- Macedonia
- Moldova
- Panama
- Peru
- Singapore
- Trinidad and Tobago



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