Foreword

Up to the end of the 1990s, the OECD's comparisons of education outcomes were mainly based on measures of years of schooling, which don't necessarily reflect what people actually know and can do. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) changed this. The idea behind PISA lay in testing the knowledge and skills of students directly, through a metric that was internationally agreed upon; linking that with data from students, teachers, schools and systems to understand performance differences; and then harnessing the power of collaboration to act on the data, both by creating shared points of reference and by leveraging peer pressure.

The aim with PISA was not to create another layer of top-down accountability, but to help schools and policy makers shift from looking upward within the education system towards looking outward to the next teacher, the next school, the next country. In essence, PISA counts what counts, and makes that information available to educators and policy makers so they can make more informed decisions.

The OECD countries that initiated PISA tried to make PISA different from traditional assessments in other ways too. In a world that rewards individuals increasingly not just for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know, PISA goes beyond assessing whether students can reproduce what they have learned in school. To do well in PISA, students have to be able to extrapolate from what they know, think across the boundaries of subject-matter disciplines, apply their knowledge creatively in novel situations and demonstrate effective learning strategies. For example, in the PISA mathematics assessment, students don't just have to demonstrate mathematical content knowledge, but also that they can think like a mathematician, translate real-world problems into the world of mathematics, reason mathematically, and interpret mathematical solutions in the original problem context. If all we do is teach our children what we know, they might remember enough to follow in our footsteps; but if they learn how to learn, and are able to think for themselves, and work with others, they can go anywhere they want.

Some people argue that the PISA tests are unfair, because they may confront students with problems they have not encountered in school. But then life is unfair, because the real test in life is not whether we can remember what we learned at school, but whether we will be able to solve problems that we can't possibly anticipate today.

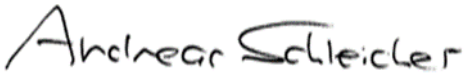
But the greatest strength of PISA lies in its working methods. Most assessments are centrally planned and then contracted to engineers who build them. That's how tests are created that are owned by an institution – but not by the people who are needed to change education. PISA turned that on its head. The idea of PISA attracted the world's best thinkers and mobilised hundreds of experts, educators and scientists from the participating countries to build a global assessment through a global expert community. Today, we would call that crowdsourcing; but whatever we call it, it created the ownership that was critical for success.

In a nutshell, PISA owes its success to a collaborative effort between the participating countries, the national and international experts and institutions working within the framework of the PISA Consortium, and the OECD. Subject-matter experts, practitioners and policy makers from the participating countries worked tirelessly to build agreement on which learning outcomes are important to measure and how to measure them best; to design and validate assessment tasks that can reflect those measures adequately and accurately across countries and cultures; and to find ways to compare the results meaningfully and reliably. The OECD co-ordinated this effort and worked with countries to make sense of the results and compile the reports.

PISA 2022 was the eighth round of the international assessment since the programme was launched in 2000, with an unprecedented number of countries taking part. Every PISA test assesses students' knowledge and skills in mathematics, science and reading; each assessment focuses on one of these subjects and provides a summary assessment of the other two. PISA 2022 also captures a wider range of cognitive, social and emotional student outcomes, captured in the new PISA Happy Life Dashboard.

Over the past two decades, PISA has become the world's premier yardstick for comparing quality, equity and efficiency in learning outcomes across countries, and an influential force for education reform. It has helped policy makers lower the cost of political action by backing difficult decisions with evidence – but it has also raised the political cost of inaction by exposing areas where policy and practice have been unsatisfactory.

These latest PISA results show that education systems can provide both high-quality instruction and equitable learning opportunities for all, and that they can support academic excellence not at the expense of student's well-being, but through students' well-being. At the same time, the results also show that many education systems are not up to this task. This publication provides many pointers as to what we can do to change this. Countries and economies that take part in PISA are culturally diverse and have attained different levels of economic development. Nevertheless, they face a common challenge--to support children and young people so they can reach their full potential as learners and human beings. PISA provides the evidence and the policy insights that countries need to address these matters. There is an urgent need to take action. The task for governments is to help education systems rise to this challenge.



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