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New International Comparative Study Released

On the most recent international tests, students in a number of countries consistently outperformed their U.S. peers across the board in reading, math, and science, according to U.S. Performance Across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to The Condition of Education 2009, a report released today by the Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Education Statistics.

This report, for the first time, pulls together the evidence from the most recent international assessments taken by nearly a million students from 85 countries worldwide. This includes three internationally benchmarked exams -- the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). While the mathematics scores of U.S. students have improved since 1995, there have been no gains in science or reading.

Results from these international tests already have been released separately. However, this special analysis brings the results altogether to reveal how the United States compares with other countries across all three core subjects and at the elementary, middle and high school level in terms of students' average scores and the percentage of students reaching internationally benchmarked performance levels. It also examines trends in U.S. student performance and the range of performance for the highest- and lowest-scoring students in each country. Although the tests differ somewhat by content, grades tested and countries participating, several trends emerge.

Findings include:

- * In reading, the average scores of U.S. students are the same or higher than their peers in roughly three-quarters of the other countries that have participated in PIRLS and PISA assessments. Moreover, the number of countries that outperformed the United States on PIRLS increased from three in 2001 to seven in 2006 among the 28 countries that participated in both tests.
- * In mathematics, results from the 2007 TIMSS assessment show that U.S. students have improved at both grades 4 and 8 since the first administration of TIMSS in 1995.
- * The most recent PISA results suggests that U.S. 15-year-olds are not

as successful in applying mathematics knowledge and skills to real-world tasks as their peers in many other developed nations. The mathematics average score placed U.S. 15-year-olds in the bottom quarter of participating developed nations, a position unchanged from 2003.

* In science, results from TIMSS 2007 assessment show that U.S. 4th graders have fallen behind their peers in several countries, even though their average scores in science have not declined since the first administration of TIMSS in 1995. Among the other 15 countries that participated in the 1995 and 2007 TIMSS at grade 4, the average science score increased in seven countries and decreased in five countries; at grade 8, the average science score increased in five countries and decreased in three countries among the other 18 countries that participated in both 1995 and 2007.

The full text of "U.S. Performance Across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to The Condition of Education 2009" (in HTML format) can be viewed at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2009/analysis/>