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## NEWS RELEASE

### **PISA 2009 reveals gender disparities, decline in reading engagement among teens**

NEWARK, DE, December 7, 2010—The 2009 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey results, released December 7 by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), show an increase in the disparity between females and males in reading literacy, coupled with a general decline in reading engagement.

Female students outperformed males in all participating countries, though the size of the difference varied across countries, with the smallest gap found in Colombia and the largest in Albania.

"This disparity in reading literacy achievement in favor of females continues a near decade-long pattern established in PISA 2000 and observed consistently in other international reading studies," notes William Brozo (USA), who chairs the International Reading Association (IRA) PISA/PIRLS Task Force, which is charged with interpreting the outcomes of international studies of reading literacy and their relevance for teaching and policy.

"The large increase in the average gender difference across OECD countries could reflect reduced reading engagement levels among males," he adds, "or may relate to the inclusion of new PISA passages and questions in 2009 that favored females."

#### **Shanghai-China, South Korea, Finland lead, U.S. ranks 17th**

The PISA test seeks to measure how well 15-year-olds around the world are prepared to meet the challenges of today's global societies. This was the fourth PISA test administered since 2000 and the first since then to have a major focus on reading, allowing for an extensive analysis of trends in performance and engagement.

Representative national samples of 15-year-olds in 65 countries (including 34 OECD member/applicant countries) took part—over 470,000 students in all. Participating students completed a paper-based test of reading literacy involving five text types (argumentation, description, exposition, narration, and instruction) and a questionnaire that asked them about their engagement in reading, their enjoyment of reading, and their understanding of the value of various reading strategies.

The highest-scoring countries on the reading test were Shanghai-China, South Korea, Finland, Hong-Kong China, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan. All had average scores well above the average for OECD member countries. The United States ranked 17th, with an average score that was close to the OECD average and the average scores of Germany, Iceland, Poland, and Sweden. Countries that performed below the OECD average included Italy, Slovenia, Greece, the Czech Republic, Israel, and the Russian Federation.

A number of developing countries experienced significant improvement in reading performance since 2000, including Albania, Chile, Latvia, and Peru, though their average scores continue to lag behind the OECD average. Smaller gains were recorded by Germany, Poland, and Portugal.

A handful of countries, including Austria, Australia, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and Sweden, recorded significant drops in achievement. According to the IRA Task Force, there is no obvious reason why performance in these countries has dropped, and it may take some time to tease out why they performed less well this time around. Average reading performance across OECD countries was the same in 2000 and 2009.

### **Decline in engagement**

On average across OECD countries in 2009, the following trends were observed regarding reading engagement:

- 63% of students reported that they engaged in at least some daily reading for enjoyment. For example, in Shanghai-China, 92% reported that they read for enjoyment every day, while in Finland it was 67%.
- Females (73%) were more likely than males (54%) to report reading for enjoyment.
- The percentage of all students reporting that they read for enjoyment dropped from 68% to 63% between 2000 and 2009, with similar size declines for males and females. However, no changes in reading for enjoyment were observed in the United States, with overall engagement at just under 60% (70% of females and 50% of males) in both years.

According to Gerry Shiel (Ireland), also a member of the IRA PISA/PIRLS Task Force, "the general decline in engagement in reading is a major concern, given that there is a very strong association between engagement and reading performance, and engagement can, to some extent, reduce the negative effects of socioeconomic status on reading performance. It is also a matter of concern that almost four-in-ten students report that they never read for enjoyment."

PISA 2009 also asked students to evaluate the extent to which a range of strategies are useful for learning and remembering information in texts. These strategies include: "After reading the text, I discuss its content with other people," "I underline important parts of the text," "I summarize the text in my own words," and "I read quickly through the text twice."

On average, students across OECD countries whose evaluations of the strategies matched those of experts had considerably higher levels of reading performance than those who were less familiar or uncertain about the usefulness of these strategies. A similar outcome was observed for strategies relating to summarizing text (e.g., "I read through the text, underlining the most important sentences").

According to another IRA Task Force member, Christine Garbe (Germany), “PISA confirms the importance of key reading comprehension strategies. It is important for adolescents of all ability levels to be familiar with effective reading strategies and to have opportunities to apply these across texts in a range of subject areas, with support from their teachers as needed.”

A test of electronic reading was also administered in 19 countries participating in PISA 2009, but the results of this innovative test will not be available until mid-2011.

Members of the IRA PISA/PIRLS Task Force, including Brozo, Shiel, and Garbe, as well as Ambigapathy Pandian (Malaysia), will make presentations on PISA 2009 at the IRA Annual Convention in Orlando in May 2011, and at the European Conference on Reading in Mons, Belgium, in August 2011.

Further information about PISA 2009 can be accessed at [www.pisa.oecd.org](http://www.pisa.oecd.org).

**Performance of Selected Countries in PISA 2009, Relative to the OECD Average Score**

Above OECD Average	Not Different from OECD Average	Below OECD Average
South Korea	Norway	Italy
Finland	Estonia	Greece
Canada	Switzerland	Czech Republic
New Zealand	Poland	Israel
Japan	United States	Austria
Australia	Ireland	Russian Federation
Netherlands	France	Mexico

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The International Reading Association is a professional membership organization dedicated to promoting high levels of literacy for all by improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit.