Excellence and equity

- In Australia, the difference between ‘more disadvantaged’ and ‘more affluent’ schools for Year 4 reading is, on average, 56 score points.
- Other countries, which also score higher in reading than Australia (such as Hong Kong and Canada), have a smaller gap in achievement between ‘more affluent’ and ‘more disadvantaged’ schools.
- Within Australia, the largest difference, 80 score points, is in the Northern Territory, while the smallest difference, 24 score points, is in South Australia.
DiD You Know?

Research indicates a clear link between socioeconomic background and achievement. From the early studies of Coleman et al. (1966) to more recent studies using PISA data, research has shown that student socioeconomic background is important, and that the pooled effect of student socioeconomic background is even more important (Thomson & De Bortoli, 2009). There is a clear advantage for students attending schools in which there is a predominantly advantaged student intake.
The international picture

Australia’s performance on PIRLS was not as high as might have been thought, given that our students generally perform well on PISA reading literacy. However there is also a wide gap in achievement on PISA between students from a disadvantaged background and students from an affluent background. While some students in disadvantaged schools perform well, and some students in affluent schools perform poorly, one way for Australia to improve its performance on international assessments is to improve the performance of all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In Australia, the difference between ‘more disadvantaged’ and ‘more affluent’ schools for Year 4 reading is, on average, 56 score points, more than half a standard deviation.

In Canada – a high-performing country with an overall average score of 548 – the difference is just 24 score points.

In Hong Kong, where 50 per cent of schools are ‘more disadvantaged’ and just 12 per cent ‘more affluent,’ the difference is just 12 score points. Clearly, it is possible to achieve excellence and equity in a school system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>More disadvantaged schools (%)</th>
<th>Neither more disadvantaged nor more affluent schools (%)</th>
<th>More affluent schools (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average overall score on PIRLS:
- Australia: 527
- New Zealand: 531
- Germany: 541
- Canada: 548
- England: 552
- Ireland: 552
- USA: 556
- Singapore: 567
- Hong Kong: 571

International Average: 541

ASK YOURSELF

Given the relationship between student composition and Year 4 reading achievement is not the same across countries, or even across Australian states and territories, what factors do you think might account for the differences? What might we be able to do to change this situation in Australia?
The Australian picture

SCORE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AFFLUENT AND DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

In all states other than South Australia, the difference between ‘more affluent’ and ‘more disadvantaged’ schools is large – more than half a standard deviation – while the largest difference, 80 score points, is in the Northern Territory, which also has the lowest overall average score of 509. In South Australia, by comparison, the difference is just 24 score points.

ASK YOURSELF

What are the factors that you think might help explain why students from disadvantaged homes do not perform as well as those from affluent homes on assessments such as PIRLS?

Why might this be worse for students from disadvantaged homes who go to school with a large proportion of similarly disadvantaged students?

Why might the differences be less for students from disadvantaged homes who attend more affluent schools?

STAY TUNED...

International research points to a framework for effective schools. The next edition of Snapshots will explore some of these factors within Australia for ‘more disadvantaged’ schools and those from ‘more affluent’ schools.

References


The data presented here are drawn from the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011), part of a suite of international comparative education studies that Australian students take part in, including the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which are part of Australia’s National Assessment Program. Further information about Australia’s participation in TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA can be found at www.timss.acer.edu.au or www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa.

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