

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021

Brochure

A Publication of the National Center for Education Statistics at IES



What is PIRLS?

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international assessment and research project designed to measure reading achievement at the fourth-grade level, as well as school and teacher practices related to instruction. PIRLS was previously assessed in 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016 with the United States participating in all past assessments. In 2021, PIRLS will involve students from more than 50 countries, including the United States. For the first time, PIRLS will be completely electronic and administered on a tablet with a keyboard. This new format for the assessment is called *digitalPIRLS*. Also for 2021, we will be administering the assessment only to fifth-grade students.

PIRLS is sponsored by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and conducted in the United States by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education.

Why is PIRLS important?

PIRLS provides a unique opportunity to compare the reading of U.S. fourth-grade



students with that of their peers in countries around the world. PIRLS complements what we learn from national assessments by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of student performance relative to students around the world. The results inform national discussions about education as well as international competitiveness. As stated above, for 2021, only fifth-grade students will be assessed.

PIRLS provides valuable benchmark information on how U.S. students compare to students around the world, allows educators and policymakers to examine other education systems for practices



that could have applications to the United States, and contributes to ongoing discussions of ways to improve the quality of education of all students.

What type of assessment is PIRLS?

PIRLS is developed through an international consensus-building process involving input from U.S. and international experts in reading and measurement. In a final step, the assessment is endorsed as suitable by all participating countries. The assessment contains a mix of questions: some require students to select appropriate responses, while others require that students provide written answers. Examples of PIRLS items are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/released.asp>.

Key findings from PIRLS 2016

At grade 4, the U.S. average reading score (549) was higher than the PIRLS scale centerpoint of 500. The U.S. was among the top 13 education systems (12 education systems had higher averages and 15 were not measurably different) and scored higher, on average, than 30 education systems.

In the new 2016 ePIRLS online assessment the U.S. average score was 557, which was lower than the averages for 3 education systems, higher than the average for 10 education systems, and not measurably different from the averages for 2 education systems.

Other information collected by PIRLS

PIRLS is more than an assessment of student knowledge in reading. PIRLS also considers the context in which learning occurs. Students, teachers, and schools are asked about a variety of aspects of the environments in which content is taught, learned, practiced, and applied. In this way, PIRLS provides each country with a rich source of information on the factors related to reading achievement.

Countries and education systems that participated in PIRLS and ePIRLS in 2016

Country	2016	
	PIRLS	ePIRLS
Australia	•	
Austria	•	
Azerbaijan	•	
Bahrain	•	
Belgium (Flemish)-BEL	•	
Belgium (French)-BEL	•	
Bulgaria	•	
Canada	•	•
Chile	•	
Chinese Taipei	•	•
Czech Republic	•	
Denmark	•	•
Egypt	•	
England-GBR	•	
Finland	•	
France	•	
Georgia	•	•
Germany	•	
Hong Kong-CHN	•	
Hungary	•	
Iran, Islamic Republic of	•	
Ireland	•	•
Israel	•	•
Italy	•	•
Kazakhstan	•	
Kuwait	•	
Latvia	•	
Lithuania	•	
Macao-CHN	•	
Malta	•	
Morocco	•	
Netherlands	•	
New Zealand	•	
Northern Ireland-GBR	•	
Norway	•	•
Oman	•	
Poland	•	
Portugal	•	•
Qatar	•	
Russian Federation	•	
Saudi Arabia	•	
Singapore	•	•
Slovak Republic	•	
Slovenia	•	•
South Africa	•	
Spain	•	
Sweden	•	•
Trinidad and Tobago	•	
United Arab Emirates	•	•
United States	•	•

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is authorized to conduct this study under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543), and to collect students' education records from educational agencies or institutions for the purpose of evaluating federally supported education programs under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(3)(iii) and 99.35). All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151). In the United States, PIRLS is conducted by NCES, part of the U.S. Department of Education, and the data are being collected by Westat. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has approved the data collection under OMB # 1850-0645.



For questions about PIRLS 2021, contact the PIRLS U.S. Help Desk at (855) 951-1215 or email PIRLS@westat.com.

Study Authorization and Confidentiality

All of the information collected is protected as required by law. NCES is authorized to conduct this study under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543), and to collect students' education records from educational agencies or institutions for the purpose of evaluating federally supported education programs under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(3)(iii) and 99.35). Information collected will help the U.S. Department of Education's ongoing efforts to benchmark student achievement in the United States. Participation is voluntary. All of the information provided by school staff and students may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151). The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has approved the data collection under OMB #1850-0645. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.