

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021

Frequently Asked Questions

U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

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What is PIRLS?

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international assessment and research project designed to measure trends in reading achievement at the fourth-grade level as well as school and teacher practices related to instruction. Since 2001, PIRLS has been administered every 5 years. PIRLS 2021, the fifth study in the series, 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.

Why was my school selected for participation?

Your school was randomly selected so that the overall U.S. sample will be representative of the overall U.S. school population. The random selection process is important for ensuring that a country's sample accurately reflects its schools and, therefore, can fairly be compared with samples of schools from other countries.

Why should my school and students participate?

PIRLS informs national discussions about education policy as well as international competitiveness. It is important for selected schools to participate because they represent similar U.S. schools across the country. When students participate and give their best effort, PIRLS gets the most accurate measure possible of student achievement in the U.S. to compare with other countries.

Why is PIRLS being administered to Grade 5 students instead of to Grade 4 students?

Because of the various COVID-19 pandemic-related risks associated with conducting PIRLS in the spring 2020-21 school year, the United States has opted to administer PIRLS in fall 2021—at the tail end of the international PIRLS assessment period, which was extended on account of the pandemic. In fall 2021, the grade 4 cohort of U.S. students comparable to their international peers will be starting grade 5.

Will all our fifth-grade students be asked to participate?

It depends on the number of fifth-grade classrooms in the school. In schools with only one or two such classrooms, all students will be asked to participate. In schools with more than two such classrooms, only students in two randomly selected classrooms will be asked to participate. In addition, some students with special needs or who are English language learners may be excused from the assessment as needed.

Who conducts the PIRLS assessment?

The entire assessment process will be administered by trained PIRLS representatives from Westat, a research organization under contract with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education. 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), and approval of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget under OMB # 1850-0645.

How are the teacher and school questionnaires administered?

The teacher and school questionnaires are administered either online from a secure website or via a hardcopy form. Teacher questionnaires take about 30 minutes to complete and ask teachers questions about their experience, available resources, and instructional practices. School questionnaires take about 35 minutes to complete and ask about school practices and resources.

Do teachers need to help administer the assessment?

No, PIRLS representatives will visit the school on the day of the assessment. The PIRLS representatives will administer the assessments to students.

Do schools need to provide computer equipment for the test?

No, PIRLS representatives will bring all the equipment needed for the test, including tablets, styluses, and keyboards.

When will the assessment be conducted?

PIRLS 2021 will be conducted between October 4 and October 29, 2021. Each school will be notified of its scheduled assessment date in spring/fall of 2021. PIRLS representatives will work with schools to identify an alternate date should there be a conflict on the given date.

Where will the assessment be conducted?

The assessment will be conducted in the schools that are selected to participate.

How long does the assessment take?

The amount of time spent with students will be approximately 2.5 hours, including time for directions and two breaks. PIRLS representatives will need access to the testing area for a total of around 4.25 hours, including time to set up and break down equipment before and after the assessment.

What will happen with the collected data?

The data from the assessment will be used to evaluate how the knowledge and skills of the U.S. students compare to those of their peers in other participating countries. 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). Reports of the findings from the assessment will not identify participating districts, schools, students, or individual staff. Individual responses will be combined with those of other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

Are schools required by federal law to participate?

School participation is voluntary. However, we hope you will participate in this study so that students like those in your school are accurately and fairly represented.

What are the benefits?

The nation as a whole benefits from PIRLS by having a greater understanding of how the reading knowledge and skills of U.S. students compare with students from other countries. To thank participating schools and individuals for their time and effort, we offer tokens of appreciation: schools that participate in PIRLS will receive \$200 and the school coordinator (staff person designated to assist with the study) will receive \$100. Teachers who complete a survey will receive \$20 Amazon gift cards, and each student who participates will receive a small gift.

Where can I find more information about PIRLS?

Visit the PIRLS website at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/>.

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

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