

To News Editor
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Hong Kong Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results Released

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) organized the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This international study compares and evaluates the effectiveness of the education system by assessing how well 15-year-olds approaching the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills essential for participation in society. Over 40 countries and regions joined the Programme.

The HKPISA was conducted by the Hong Kong Centre for International Student Assessment of the Institute of Education Research of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. During January to February 2002, 4,405 students from 140 schools including government, aided and independent schools were randomly selected for the assessment exercise.

Overall, Hong Kong students performed well compared with students in most other countries, ranking first in mathematics, third in science, and sixth in reading among the participating countries. Researchers studied the equality in education and how students' socio-economic backgrounds (SES) affect their ability, together with other factors affecting students' reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. As far as equality in education is concerned, Hong Kong's high scores were not gained at the expense of higher inequality in schooling. The disparities between high (95th percentile) and low achievers (5th percentile) are relatively small, suggesting that most students in Hong Kong have similar access to, and benefit from, the Hong Kong educational system.

The study also found that parental involvement is important to students' literacy performance. Students who communicated with their parents more often about daily "social" topics (e.g. discussing schoolwork, spending time talking, and eating the evening meal together) tended to perform better in reading, mathematics and science. Both cultural communication (e.g. discussing books, films and television programs and political and social issues) and cultural activities (e.g. visiting museums, going to concerts and watching live theatre) had moderately positive effects on literacy performance in Hong Kong and many countries. Family homework supervision was negatively associated with literacy performance. In other words, low achievers obtained more family support in homework supervision. This indicates that lower achievers may need more help from family members than higher achievers.

An interesting relationship between parental investment and student literacy performance was observed. Students whose parents invested more on educational resources such as a desk, a calculator, a dictionary and a quiet place to study performed

better than others. In particular, the number of books at home has a strong positive association with the three domains of literacy performance. However, material resources such as cellular phones, TV sets, computers, motorcars, and so on were found to have negative effects on achievement in Hong Kong. This result is inconsistent with those results identified in many other countries whereas family possessions usually have a small positive effect on achievement.

The study proves that with cooperation and involvement of schools, teachers and parents, we are able to provide a quality and equal learning environment for our younger generation. Another round of assessment, HKPISA 2003, is now in process and schools are being invited to join. The assessment will concentrate on mathematical ability. Assessment result of individual school will be kept in confidence. Participating schools will be notified their own result and that of Hong Kong as a whole.
