The OECD Test for Schools (based on PISA)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

- What is the OECD Test for Schools (based on PISA)?
- What is PISA?
- What is the relationship between the OECD Test for Schools and PISA?
- Don’t other tests already measure the same things?
- What will the OECD Test for Schools tell us?
- What will the results of the pilot trial of the OECD Test for Schools not tell us?
- Why was there a pilot trial of the assessment?
- Why compare school-level results internationally?
- Isn’t there already too much testing?
- Won’t this test lead to school rankings?
- When will the assessment tool be available?
- What are the conditions for conducting the OECD Test for Schools?
- Will the assessment be available in other countries?
- Who is behind the OECD Test for Schools pilot trial?
WHAT IS THE OECD TEST FOR SCHOOLS (BASED ON PISA)?

The OECD Test for Schools, based on the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), is a student assessment tool for schools and networks of schools that supports research, benchmarking and school-improvement efforts. Like PISA, it assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. And also like PISA, it examines how well students can apply what they have learned in unfamiliar settings, both in and outside of school.

WHAT IS PISA?

PISA is an international study that was launched by the OECD in 1997. It evaluates education systems worldwide every three years by assessing 15-year-olds’ competencies in reading, mathematics and science. To date, over half a million students representing 28 million 15-year-olds in over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA. The main PISA two-hour test assesses what students know and can do in reading, math and science. The aggregate results per country/economy have informed national and global policy discussions since 2000. Results from the 2012 cycle of the main PISA study will be published on 3 December 2013.

To learn more about PISA, watch this video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1I9tuScLUA

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OECD TEST FOR SCHOOLS AND PISA?

While the international PISA assessment is intended to provide national results that can be used for international comparisons and to inform policy discussions, the OECD Test for Schools is designed to provide school-level results for benchmarking and school-improvement purposes.

The school-level assessment complements the main PISA studies by making PISA-based results more accessible to a wider audience, empowering local educators to participate in and contribute to policy debates in their countries.

The OECD Test for Schools was designed along the same assessment frameworks as the main PISA studies, but the assessments are different. One of the main differences is that the OECD Test for Schools is designed to provide results for individual schools and not to provide aggregate national or system-level results. Given this difference, participation in one assessment should not be confused with the other. The test that students take in participating schools provides results that are comparable to the international PISA scales when administered under appropriate conditions – even though they are not national PISA scores per se. The comparability of the results is what allows schools to see how they compare in relation to their peers in some of world’s leading education systems.
The OECD Test for Schools measures students’ ability to retrieve and creatively apply knowledge. It is not pegged to a specific curriculum, but measures core international competencies in reading, mathematics and science. It is meant to complement – not duplicate – national content and curricula, including the United States’ Common Core Standards.

In addition to assessing students’ ability to apply the knowledge they have acquired, the OECD Test for Schools also benchmarks how students compare with their peers within and beyond state and national borders, an indication of how well they are prepared to become members of an increasingly global society. In addition, through questionnaires, the assessment collects information from students and school principals on the learning environment within schools and in classrooms, teacher-student relations, and students’ attitudes towards and engagement in learning.

The assessment provides school-level estimates of performance and school-level information on the learning environment and students’ attitudes gathered from the student questionnaires. Results and information on individual students is not reported. This protects both the privacy of participating students and the validity of responses obtained from students.

The pilot trial of the OECD Test for Schools conducted in the United States is not meant to be statistically representative of schools in the United States. Rather, it is implemented with a convenience sample of schools and districts based on interest. The results of the pilot for the 105 schools that participate in the United States will NOT provide any information regarding trends, and the results cannot tell us anything about what “types” of schools perform better than others.

For information regarding student performance in the United States, readers should consult findings from the main PISA studies:

- PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science
- Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States
This international pilot trial was undertaken with 126 schools across Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States in 2012. The purpose of the pilot was to confirm the administrative conditions and procedures of the assessment, explore how results would be reported, and obtain feedback from the participating schools and districts before the instruments are made publicly available in 2013.

Given our global, knowledge-based economies, it has become all the more important to compare students not only to local or national standards, but also to the performance of the world’s top-performing school systems. In the United States, there has been growing interest in comparing student performance to international benchmarks, both as a gauge of how prepared students are to participate in a globalised society and as a means of setting targets above and beyond basic proficiency levels or local expectations.

The OECD Test for Schools is voluntary for schools that are interested in international benchmarking and improving their student outcomes. It is not to be used for mandated or accountability purposes. The assessment is not meant to take learning time away from students and classrooms; rather, it is a learning experience for teachers and students that can prompt discussions on the types of knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant in a quickly changing world.

The OECD Test for Schools and its results are not meant to be interpreted or used as school rankings or for “league tables”. Rankings can be counterproductive to school-improvement efforts because they do not give the school community (principals, teachers, students and parents) an active voice as agents of improvement and innovation.

The following principles should guide the use of the assessment as a tool for improvement and informed discussions:

- *Performance needs to be considered not in absolute terms, but in terms of equity and relative effectiveness of schools.*

Many schools are successful in providing their students with the skills and knowledge that enable them to compete with peers from the best education systems in the world, and some are even able to do so with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is also clear, however, that there is room for improvement among high-performing schools as well as those that may be underachieving.
Schools with performance results that place them at the very top in comparison with other schools in the United States and in other countries should not see in the tool a means to “validate” their excellence for publicity; they should see it as a **means to strive for even higher levels of performance for all students**. At the same time, school staff and students in underperforming schools should be encouraged to know that improvement is not only possible, but within their reach and ability.

- **International benchmarking supported by the school assessment and reports should be seen as a process.**

  The information on students’ achievement, their engagement, and the teaching and learning environment at participating schools should stimulate further reflection and discussion among school staff and local educational authorities. Peer-to-peer learning opportunities and the sharing of effective practices are the logical next step in the process of international benchmarking for improvement. The wealth of PISA results and related OECD research and resources (reports, videos and publications) are easily accessible through e-books provided to schools and their active hyperlinks. Users of the OECD Test for Schools assessment and readers of the results are thus invited to explore these and other resources in the search for excellence and best practices.

- **Although schools and districts are invited to openly share and discuss their results with the local education community (school staff, students and parents), they are in no way obliged to do so by choosing to use the assessment.**

  The assessment should be considered a tool for school improvement, not a tool for developing ranking or league tables. The tool measures cumulative student learning to inform, not penalise, schools and to support improvement locally.

- **Performance should also be considered in the context of the quality of the learning environment at schools.**

  In addition to reviewing the school-level estimates of student performance, schools and local educators are also invited to consider the information about teacher-student relations, disciplinary climate, and students’ attitudes and engagement towards learning that are provided in the school reports. Effective teaching for better student outcomes, both cognitive and non-cognitive, is not uni-dimensional or captured by a single data point. Users of the assessment are thus invited to consider the multiple factors that influence performance that are covered in the school reports.

- **In the future, the OECD Test for Schools can provide important peer-to-peer learning opportunities – locally, nationally and internationally – as well as the opportunity to share good practices to help identify “what works”.**
WHEN WILL THE ASSESSMENT TOOL BE AVAILABLE?

In the United States, information will be made public in April 2013 to allow schools to begin to plan their use of the test starting in September 2013 (e.g. for the 2013-14 academic year) with the testing service providers that are accredited for this purpose.

Schools and districts in the United States that are interested in the assessment and in signing up should visit:
http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-basedtestforschools/

And they can also write to:
OECDTestforSchoolsSignUp@oecd.org

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING THE OECD TEST FOR SCHOOLS?

Schools that decide to implement the assessment will need to work with the service providers to make sure that quality standards and procedures are followed in preparation for administering the test and on the day of testing. The minimum target number of students tested at each school is 75, but this will vary depending on the specific characteristics of the school.

For the assessment, students respond to approximately two hours of test questions in reading, mathematics and science and answer a 30-minute student questionnaire that is an important part of the assessment. Overall, the testing experience for a student lasts approximately three to three-and-a-half hours, including instructions and break periods. In addition, school authorities (e.g. principals, directors, school masters) of participating schools will be asked to provide information on their school by filling out a questionnaire.

WILL THE ASSESSMENT BE AVAILABLE IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

As of March 2013, in addition to the United States, the OECD is engaging with Spain and the United Kingdom to explore ways to make the assessment available and identify the appropriate governance models and conditions.
The school reports and the work around the development and implementation of the OECD Test for Schools were produced under the auspices of the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills in consultation with members of the PISA Governing Board from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The development of the assessment and the implementation of the pilot trial were carried out with support from America Achieves, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Kern Family Foundation, and the National Public Education Support Fund. Additional support for the pilot trial was provided by the Craig and Barbara Barrett Foundation, the Bechtel Group Foundation, Birmingham Public Schools, Blue Valley Schools, the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona, and the Stuart Foundation. Additionally, EdLeader21 and its members provided very useful feedback on initial drafts of the content of the school reports.
Schools and districts in the United States that are interested in the assessment and in signing up should visit:

http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-basedtestforschools/

And they can also write to:

OECDTestforSchoolsSignUp@oecd.org