PISA IN FOCUS 24

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What do students think about school?

- Most students think that what they learned in school is useful for them or their future.
- Students' attitudes towards school are associated with their reading skills.
- Students who report that the climate at their school is conducive to learning tend to have more positive attitudes towards school.

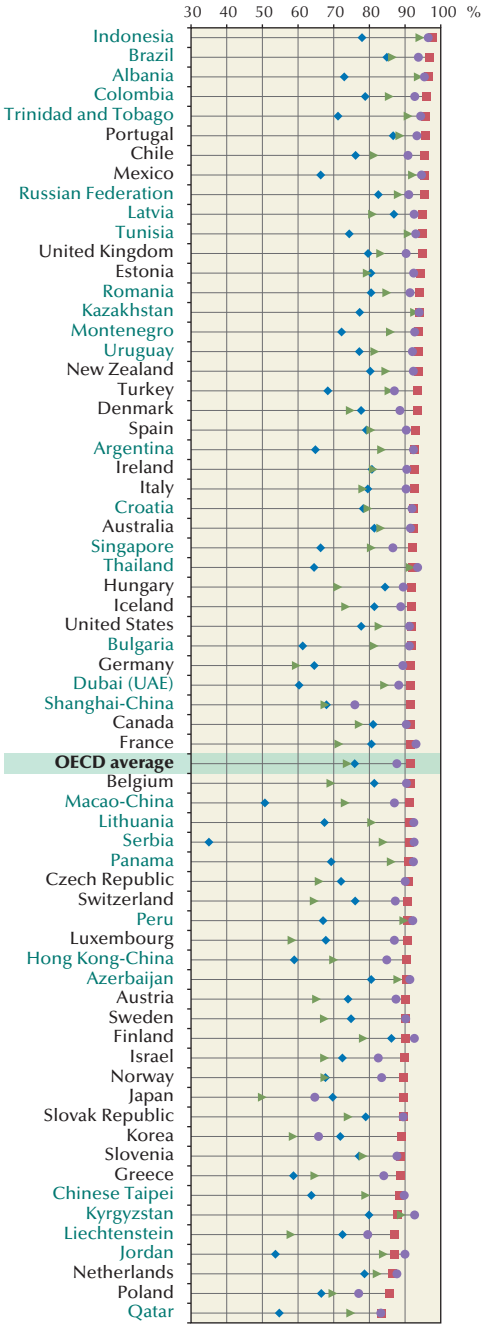
Students' attitudes towards schooling can be influenced by their teachers, their peers or the atmosphere at school. PISA 2009 sought to find out whether 15-year-olds feel that what they have learned in school is useful for them, both in the immediate and for their future. The assessment asked students whether they think that school has done little to prepare them for adult life when they leave school; that school has been a waste of time; that school has helped to give them confidence to make decisions; and that school has taught them things that could be useful in a job. Students were asked to report whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed with those statements.

Most students think that school is useful…

Across OECD countries, around nine out of ten students reported that they do not think school has been a waste of time (91%) and they think that school has taught them things that could be useful in a job (88%). Some 76% of students think that school has prepared them for adult life, and 74% believe that school has helped to give them confidence to make decisions.

While in general students reported positive attitudes towards school, students' perceptions vary considerably across countries. For example, over 90% of students in Albania, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Tunisia think that school has helped to give them confidence to make decisions, while fewer than 60% of students in Germany, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg think so. However, students in different countries may not always mean the same thing when they answer such questions.

Do students think school is useful?



- School has been a waste of time (disagree or strongly disagree)
- School has taught me things that could be useful in a job (agree or strongly agree)
- School helped to give me confidence to make decisions (agree or strongly agree)
- School has done little to prepare me for adult life when I leave school (disagree or strongly disagree)

…and students who think school is useful tend to be high performers…

In most countries, students who think school is useful are more likely to have high PISA test scores in reading, and students who have high scores in reading tend to report that they think school is useful. In 48 countries and economies, those students who performed well in reading tended to report more positive attitudes towards school than those who had lower scores. A weak but negative relationship is observed only in Germany, Greece and Shanghai-China; but in Germany and Greece much of that relationship is accounted for by background characteristics of students and schools.

…and tend to have good relations with their teachers and study in classes that are conducive to learning.

In all participating countries and economies, students' positive attitudes towards schooling are related to positive attitudes towards their teachers. Students who reported that they get along well with their teachers, that most of their teachers are interested in their well-being, that most of their teachers listen to what they have to say, that, if they need extra help, they will receive it from their teachers, and that most of their teachers treat them fairly also tended to report that what they learn in school is useful. Even after accounting for various student and school characteristics, this positive relationship is observed in all participating countries and economies.

Students' views on whether or not their classes are conducive to learning are also related to their attitudes towards school. Students who reported that, during their lessons, their peers don't listen to what the teacher says, there is noise and disorder, the teacher has to wait a long time for students to quieten down, students cannot work well, and students don't start working for a long time after the lesson begins tend to think that school is not useful for them or for their future. It is noteworthy that this relationship is not simply a reflection of social background: except in Liechtenstein, the association is clearly apparent, even after accounting for student and school characteristics.

Who is more likely to think that school is useful ?

	Students who have more positive relations with teachers?	Students in classes more conducive to learning?	Boys or girls?	Socio-economically advantaged students or disadvantaged students?	Native students or students with an immigrant background?	Students in public or private schools?	Students in larger or smaller schools?	Students in academic or vocational programmes?
Australia								
Austria								
Belgium								
Canada								
Chile								
Czech Republic								
Denmark								
Estonia								
Finland								
France								
Germany								
Greece								
Hungary								
Iceland								
Ireland								
Israel								
Italy								
Japan								
Korea								
Luxembourg								
Mexico								
Netherlands								
New Zealand								
Norway								
Poland								
Portugal								
Slovak Republic								
Slovenia								
Spain								
Sweden								
Switzerland								
Turkey								
United Kingdom								
United States								
Albania								
Argentina								
Azerbaijan								
Brazil								
Bulgaria								
Colombia								
Croatia								
Dubai (UAE)								
Hong Kong-China								
Indonesia								
Jordan								
Kazakhstan								
Kyrgyzstan								
Latvia								
Liechtenstein								
Lithuania								
Macao-China								
Montenegro								
Panama								
Peru								
Qatar								
Romania								
Russian Federation								
Serbia								
Shanghai-China								
Singapore								
Chinese Taipei								
Thailand								
Trinidad and Tobago								
Tunisia								
Uruguay								
Summary for all participants	Positive relation 65/65	More conducive 64/65	Girls 28/65	Advantaged 21/65	Immigrant 18/49	Private 9/49	Larger 13/64	Vocational 13/40
	Negative relation 0/65	Less conducive 0/65	Boys 5/65	Disadvantaged 9/65	Native 4/49	Public 0/49	Smaller 2/64	Academic 3/40

Missing data

Note: The relationships between students' attitudes towards school and various characteristics of students (gender, socio-economic background and immigrant status) and schools (school climate, type of school, size, programme orientation and location) are considered together. Students' attitudes towards school are measured by a composite indicator in which all of the four questions are combined.

These associations are, in fact, mutually reinforcing: Students who have good relations with their teachers and who study in classes that are conducive to learning will think that school is useful – and their positive attitudes makes the climate at school even better.

Students' attitudes towards schooling are only weakly related to their own backgrounds or to the types of schools they attend.

In 28 of 65 participating countries and economies, girls tended to report more positive attitudes towards school than boys, when school climate and background characteristics of students and schools are considered together. Only in Australia, Chile, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom did boys tend to report more positive attitudes towards school than girls. In 21 participating countries and economies, socio-economically advantaged students tended to report more positive attitudes towards school, while the opposite was recorded in 9 countries and economies. In 18 of 49 countries and economies with comparable data, students with immigrant backgrounds tended to report more positive attitudes towards school than native students. The opposite was recorded only in Brazil, Israel, Lithuania, Mexico and Panama.

In 9 of 49 countries and economies with comparable data, students in private schools tended to report more positive attitudes towards school than students in public schools.

When it comes to the association between school size and a school's programme orientation and students' attitudes towards schooling, no consistent pattern emerges. In 13 countries, students in larger schools tended to report more positive attitudes towards school than students in smaller schools, but the opposite was recorded in two countries. In 13 of 40 countries and economies with comparable data, students following a vocational programme tended to report more positive attitudes towards school, while the opposite was recorded in three countries.

Student and school background characteristics have only a weak relationship with students' attitudes towards school, while school climate is strongly related to their attitudes. Across OECD countries, when various background characteristics of students (gender, socio-economic and immigrant background) and schools (school type, size, programme orientation and location) are considered all together, only 2% of the overall variation in students' attitudes towards school is accounted for. But when school climate (student-teacher relations and disciplinary climate) is considered as well, 20% of the variation in students' attitudes is accounted for.

The bottom line: Students' attitudes towards schooling and their reading performance are mutually reinforcing, as are their attitudes towards schooling and the atmosphere in the classroom. This means that, to some extent, students' own attitudes can shape their individual learning experiences.

For more information

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See Supporting data

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