

PISA 2015 HIGH PERFORMERS

CHINA

With over 1.36 billion people, the People’s Republic of China is the world’s most populous country and has the world’s largest education system. The gradual improvement of market mechanisms and the move towards more open policies have led to rapid growth in the Chinese economy. China’s GDP grew by over 10% per year in the decade between 2000 and 2009, on average, and was as high as 6.9% in 2015 (World Bank). With a per capita GDP of USD 7 925, China is an upper middle-income country, as defined by the World Bank.

China’s “first-level” entities of governance include provinces and autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions (namely, Hong Kong and Macao).

Four of these entities, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong, participated in PISA 2015; their combined results are reported as “B-S-J-G (China)”. Because these regions are sampled as one entity, results are not reported separately by province or municipality. The following table displays relevant information about these regions (United Nations Development Program 2013 and the China National Bureau of Statistics).

Table 1: The four regions of China surveyed in PISA 2015

Province or municipality	Population (2014, millions)	Area (km ²)	Per capita GDP (2014, RMB)	Human Development Index (2010)	
Beijing	21.52	16 410	99 995	0.821	
Shanghai	24.26	6 340	97 370	0.814	
Jiangsu	79.60	107 200	81 874	0.748	
Guangdong	107.24	179 800	63 469	0.730	
Total	B-S-J-G	232.62	309 750	76 432	N/A
	China	1 362.46	9 600 000	47 203	0.693

China's education system

China has a nine-year compulsory education system, including primary and lower secondary school. Students must sit examinations for entry into upper secondary schools and universities. Some 63.8% of Chinese students who sat the PISA 2015 test are enrolled in lower secondary school, with the majority in grade 9; the remaining 36.2% students are in upper secondary school.

To enter the teaching profession, adults with diplomas from universities or normal colleges can take the Teachers' Qualification Examination, which includes a written test and an interview. The written test assesses professional ethics, comprehensive quality, content knowledge and pedagogic skills; the interview tests basic competencies and teaching practices pedagogic skills. Contracts for teachers are no longer traditional "iron rice bowls", guaranteeing lifetime employment. Instead, teachers must pass regular inspections and evaluations. They also must renew their qualification certificates and take more than 360 hours of training every 5 years. Teachers' salaries consist of the basic salary, bonuses for performance and subsidies. The performance salary is determined by a performance evaluation system.

In recent years, China has made great efforts to promote the equity and quality of the education system, focusing attention on disadvantaged regions and people. The four priorities currently emphasised are:

- rural, remote, impoverished and ethnic areas
- primary education in rural areas, vocational education and pre-school education
- financially underprivileged students
- the development of high-quality teaching/groups of teachers.

Internal migrants in China

In 2015, more than 13.5 million students across China were migrants from within the country, mostly those who had moved, with their parents, from rural areas to cities. Some 61% of these students were located in the eastern part of China, such as in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong.

To guarantee migrant children's equal access to compulsory education, the Chinese government adheres to the policy of "two obliged", "two included" and "two exemptions and one subsidy". "Two obliged" means that the local government and local public schools are obliged to provide education opportunities to these children. "Two included" means compulsory education of migrant children should be included in urban development plans and budgets. "Two exemptions and one subsidy" means that migrant students are exempt from tuition and textbook fees, and a living subsidy will be provided for those boarding school students whose families are disadvantaged.

In 2014, the Chinese government established a nationally unified household registration (*hukou*) system. In January 2016, the Regulations on Residence Permit came into effect, allowing migrant

students to receive education in cities where their parents live and work if they have local residence permits.

In recent years, more than 80% of migrant children studied in local public schools, and up to 86% of migrant children were supported by government finances. Some 15% of the students in public schools who sat the PISA test are migrant students. Some 30 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) in China have policies that permit migrant students to sit the national college entrance examination (or *gaokao*) locally. However, many children of migrant workers stay in their hometowns. The Chinese government designed a special policy, implemented by a joint force of 27 government departments, to provide more care and protection for these children.

China's education reform

In recent years, the Chinese government has been promoting reforms in teaching methodologies, school governance, management systems and safeguarding mechanisms.

Since 2001, the basic education curriculum reform has emphasised:

- the learning process and students' attitudes towards learning in addition to the content to be taught
- encouraging active and creative problem solving, interactive and co-operative learning, and less reliance on passive rote learning
- students' growth and formative assessment
- teacher training and teachers' professional development.

The following reforms have been undertaken in the provinces and municipalities that participated in PISA 2015:

- The learning time in school and academic requirements are specified, and students are required to meet all the requirements before they can get a diploma.
- Schools are making great efforts to provide students with a variety of elective courses and not all students are required to take the same courses.
- Research-based learning is encouraged in order to promote creativity, critical thinking and social practice. Students can identify their own research topics with the help of teachers.
- Students are encouraged to take a more active role in classroom teaching.

The examination system is also undergoing gradual reform. No entrance examinations are required in compulsory education. Students attend schools in their neighbourhood. Admission to upper secondary school is not based on a single entrance exam. More emphasis has been placed on comprehensive evaluations, including students' ideological and moral qualities, physical and mental health, artistic accomplishments and involvement in the community.

The reform of the national college entrance examination attracted wide public interest. A new examination and enrolment system will be established by 2020 with two streams: one for vocational students planning to enter technical and professional colleges and universities, and one for more academically-inclined students planning to enter traditional universities. Shanghai and Zhejiang are leading this reform. The results of both the college entrance examination and the high school Academic Performance Examinations (APE) are taken into account, and the results of students' comprehensive evaluations are considered as references. Depending on university requirements and on students' personal interests, students can choose to add results of several APE subjects to their final scores.

References

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