

Foreword

More than any other skill, the ability to read is fundamental to successfully navigating the school curriculum. Moreover, it is central to shaping each individual's trajectory through life, his or her economic wellbeing, and the ability to actively and fully participate in broader society.

PIRLS 2011 is the third cycle of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and continues the long history of research in the area of reading achievement developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). PIRLS 2011 provides information on trends in reading literacy achievement of fourth grade students for countries that have participated in previous cycles of the assessment, while providing baseline data for new countries.

Two features of PIRLS 2011 have the potential to provide new insights into the role of reading in understanding educational outcomes. First, the coincidence of the TIMSS and PIRLS cycles has allowed countries for the first time to assess the same students in three subjects, enabling new analyses which explore the relationship between reading performance to achievement in mathematics and science.

Second, recognizing that the primary goal of assessments such as PIRLS is to provide countries with information that can contribute to educational reform and policy analysis, IEA has developed a new assessment—prePIRLS. Administered for the first time in 2011 at the end of the primary school cycle, prePIRLS responds to the particular demands and circumstances of those countries and sub-national entities whose children are still developing the fundamental reading skills that are prerequisites for success on PIRLS. This assessment reflects IEAs continued commitment to best serve the interests of its expanding community of participants.

PIRLS and prePIRLS require and represent a significant commitment of resources and dedication to achieve a common vision. Clearly, projects of this magnitude rely on the cooperation and support of a large number of individuals, institutions, and organizations around the world. IEA is particularly indebted to the staff members of the TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center at Boston College, who have been charged with the overall leadership of this project. Their contributions have been augmented by the staff of the IEA Data Processing and Research Center, the IEA Secretariat, Statistics Canada, and Educational Testing Service, for whose support I am also extremely grateful. While the work of the staff of this consortium makes projects like PIRLS possible, the continued leadership and direction of the PIRLS Executive Directors Ina Mullis and Michael Martin remain central to the success of this project.

In addition, projects of this size are possible only with considerable financial support. I am particularly grateful for support from IEA's major funding partners, including the US National Center for Education Statistics, the World Bank, and the many self-funding countries without which this project would not have been possible. I also wish to thank Boston College and the UK's National Foundation for Educational Research for their continued support.

Finally, as always, PIRLS would not have been possible without the National Research Coordinators and their colleagues, whose responsibility it was to manage the study at the local level, and the participation of the many teachers, students, and policymakers around the world who gave freely of their time in the interest of advancing our common understanding of reading achievement. On behalf of all who benefit from the use of the information provided by PIRLS, we are thankful for this commitment.

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