

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 30, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Trustee Request for Information

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services

RESOURCE

STAFF: Anne Mulgrew

INFORMATION

**TRUSTEE TRACKING #351 (TRUSTEE ODYNSKI), SEPTEMBER 16, 2003: WHAT ARE THE OECD TESTS TESTING AND WHAT REASONABLE CONCLUSIONS CAN BE MADE FROM THE RESULTS?:** The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in conjunction with its member countries, developed the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA measures student achievement for a sample of 15 year-old students from each participating country. The PISA achievement tests are designed to determine whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills believed (in the view of OECD) to be essential for full participation in society. The three domains measured are reading literacy, mathematics literacy and scientific literacy. The focus of the study was on “ exploration of the ways that skills vary across different social and economic groups and the factors that influence the level and distribution of skills within and between countries.” In 2000 (the year for which current data is available) reading literacy was emphasized; in 2003 mathematical literacy was emphasized and in 2006 scientific literacy will be emphasized. All three areas are tested each year.

Relative to the 31 other participating OECD countries in the 2000 study, Canada

- ranked second in reading literacy (behind Finland);
- ranked sixth in mathematical literacy (only Korea and Japan performed better statistically); and
- ranked fifth in scientific literacy (only Korea, Japan and Finland performed better statistically)

As a province, in comparison to the other countries and to other provinces in Canada, Alberta

- ranked first in reading literacy;
- ranked third in mathematical literacy (behind Japan and Quebec); and
- ranked third in scientific literacy (behind Japan and Korea).

In addition in Alberta (and Canada) the proportion of students achieving in the top 10 % of the students writing was among the highest for each test. Canada also had one of the lowest spreads in difference between the top performing students and the lowest performing students. The OECD interprets this as evidence that the Canadian education system meets the literacy needs of a broad range of students.

Most OECD countries, including Canada, have average teaching staff-student ratios below 25. When teaching staff-student ratios rise above 25, there is a continuous decline in a school's performance in all subjects measured.

In 2000, 30,000 students from across Canada participated in PISA. There is no data available for the district separate from the Alberta cohort, since the numbers tested are too small. However Edmonton Public Schools, as a part of the Alberta sample, should be pleased with the achievement in reading, mathematical and science literacy of its young people.

Further information on the PISA study can be obtained from the OECD web site at <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/>. The Canadian report on this study, from which the information in this document was obtained, is available at <http://www.cmec.ca/pisa/2000/indexe.stm>. (Anne Mulgrew, 429-8351)

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