

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…

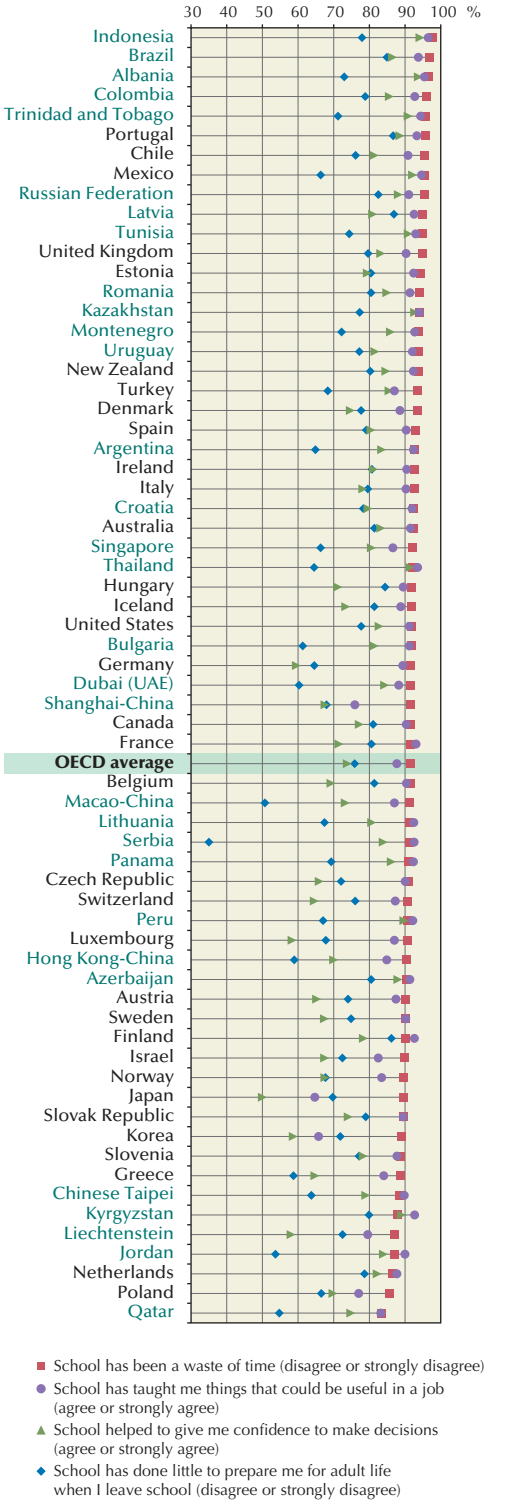
Across OECD countries, around nine out of ten students reported that they do not think school has been a waste of time (91%) and they think that school has taught them things that could be useful in a job (88%). Some 76% of students think that school has prepared them for adult life, and 74% believe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



PISA IN FOCUS

Do students think school is useful?



…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			Boys	Advantaged		Private	Larger	Vocational
Austria					Immigrant			Vocational
Belgium				Advantaged	Immigrant		Larger	
Canada				Advantaged	Immigrant	Private	Larger	
Chile			Boys				Larger	Vocational
Czech Republic								
Denmark				Advantaged	Immigrant	Private		
Estonia			Girls				Larger	
Finland			Girls	Advantaged	Immigrant			
France			Girls	Advantaged	Immigrant			
Germany				Disadvantaged	Immigrant			
Greece				Disadvantaged	Immigrant			Vocational
Hungary								
Iceland			Girls	Advantaged				
Ireland				Advantaged				
Israel				Disadvantaged	Native	Private		
Italy			Girls		Immigrant		Larger	Vocational
Japan			Girls					Vocational
Korea								Vocational
Luxembourg					Immigrant			
Mexico			Girls	Advantaged	Native		Larger	Vocational
Netherlands					Immigrant		Larger	
New Zealand			Boys	Advantaged			Smaller	
Norway				Advantaged	Immigrant			
Poland			Girls	Disadvantaged				
Portugal			Girls			Private		Vocational
Slovak Republic			Girls					
Slovenia			Girls				Larger	Vocational
Spain			Girls	Advantaged				
Sweden			Girls	Advantaged	Immigrant			
Switzerland			Girls		Immigrant			
Turkey				Disadvantaged				Vocational
United Kingdom			Boys	Advantaged				
United States				Advantaged				
Albania			Girls			Private		
Argentina								
Azerbaijan			Girls					
Brazil					Native			
Bulgaria			Girls	Advantaged				
Colombia								
Croatia					Immigrant			Vocational
Dubai (UAE)					Immigrant			
Hong Kong-China					Immigrant			
Indonesia			Girls					
Jordan			Girls					
Kazakhstan			Girls	Advantaged				
Kyrgyzstan			Girls	Advantaged				
Latvia			Girls					
Liechtenstein				Disadvantaged			Larger	
Lithuania								
Macao-China				Advantaged			Smaller	
Montenegro			Girls	Disadvantaged				
Panama					Native			
Peru				Advantaged				
Qatar				Advantaged	Immigrant			
Romania			Girls					Vocational
Russian Federation								
Serbia			Girls					
Shanghai-China				Disadvantaged				Vocational
Singapore			Boys					
Chinese Taipei				Disadvantaged				Vocational
Thailand			Girls					
Trinidad and Tobago			Girls					Vocational
Tunisia			Girls					
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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Coming next month

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