

Literacy Policies Around the Globe

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Reading As a Policy Priority

- What is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)?
- What information about education policies and reading curricula does the PIRLS Encyclopedia offer?
- How can PIRLS data be used to monitor reading achievement and evaluate education policies?
- When will PIRLS 2026 data become available?

IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

What Is PIRLS?

- An assessment of **reading achievement** at the fourth grade
- Provides **contextual data** for a comprehensive picture
- Targets the **fourth grade** as a critical point in reading education
- Administered **every 5 years** since 2001
- Offers **trends** for participating countries and benchmarking participants across the cycles

What Does PIRLS Assess?

- PIRLS assesses reading comprehension as described in the PIRLS Reading Assessment Framework.

- Reading literacy is defined as:

the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Readers can construct meaning from texts in a variety of forms. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment.

- The framework is updated with each cycle to include current reading research and developments in reading education.

PIRLS Reading Achievement

Purposes for Reading

- Literary Experience
- Acquire and use Information



Processes of Comprehension

- Focus on and Retrieve Explicitly Stated Information
- Make Straightforward Inferences
- Interpret and Integrate Ideas and Information
- Evaluate and Critique Content and Textual Elements

Literary passages and information texts (including online tasks) represent a range of engaging content and reflect students' authentic reading experiences

PIRLS Contextual Questionnaires

- Student Questionnaire
 - Students' home environment, experiences in school, and reading attitudes and habits outside of school
- Home Questionnaire (Parents/Primary Caregivers)
 - Home environment, students' early childhood education, parents' education and occupation, and parents' reading activities and attitudes
- Teacher Questionnaire (Students' Primary Reading Teachers)
 - Classroom contexts for reading instruction and teacher characteristics
- School Questionnaire (School Principals)
 - School characteristics and availability of school resources

Contextual Framework reviewed and updated with every cycle

The PIRLS Encyclopedia: Describing Education Policy and Reading Curricula

The PIRLS Encyclopedia: Education Policy and Curriculum in Reading

Curriculum Questionnaire

- Background information about language/reading curricula and education policies
 - School entry policies
 - Language of Instruction
 - Fourth Grade Language/Reading Curriculum
 - Teacher and Principal Preparation

Country Chapters

- Descriptions of the structure and organization of the country's education system
- Details of the reading curriculum
- Professional development for teachers and school leadership
- Information about reading initiatives

Highlights from PIRLS 2021: Teacher Preparations

- Just over half of all participating countries in PIRLS 2021 reported changes to policies within the past 15 years (i.e., 2011 or later).
- Common changes included:
 - Increased number of course hours
 - Higher education requirements
 - Introduction (or updates to) examinations or licensing systems
 - Creation of (or updates to) standards for professional teachers

Highlights from PIRLS 2021: Principal Preparations

- Most countries require teaching experience
- More than half require completion of a leadership training program
- Fewer than half of all participating countries in PIRLS 2021 reported changes to policies within the past 10 years (i.e., 2011 or later).
- Common changes included:
 - Higher education requirements (leadership or degree programs)
 - Introduction (or updates to) licensure and certification systems
 - Creation of (or updates to) standards

Highlights from PIRLS 2021: Reading Curricula

- The majority of countries have a national curriculum for fourth-grade language/reading instruction.
- Reading is often part of the curriculum for language instruction rather than as a separate curriculum area
- Also integrated across the curricula in more than half the countries

Highlights from PIRLS 2021: Curriculum Details

- In 2021, several countries were in the process of updating the reading curriculum
 - Newly introduced curricula (2020-2021) reported in Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Norway, Oman, and Saudi Arabia
 - 25 countries with changes introduced between 2016-2019
 - In some countries, the curriculum is reviewed and modified in each academic year
- About half of the countries' curricula specify a specific percentage of instructional time devoted to reading
- About two-thirds of the curricula place some emphasis on digital reading skills

Using PIRLS to Monitor Achievement and Education Policies

PIRLS As a Reliable Source for Evaluation

- PIRLS is the global standard for monitoring reading achievement at the fourth grade
 - Recognized by UNESCO as a source for evaluating progress towards targets of its Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)
 - Provides reliable and comparable data for countries to monitor student achievement and other outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of newly implemented strategies or initiatives on a large scale
 - Helps countries to identify weaknesses to be reviewed and addressed through future revisions to existing policies

Performance at the International Benchmarks

- Incorporates descriptions of literary and informational texts
- Describes reading comprehension skills and strategies demonstrated by students who reached each of the four international benchmarks: Low (400), Intermediate (475), High (550), and Advanced (625)
- Descriptions are contextualized using items answered successfully by students at each benchmark, enhancing the information beyond the percentage of students reaching the benchmarks

Low PIRLS International Benchmark (400)

Literary

When reading predominantly easy literary texts, students can:

- Locate, retrieve, and reproduce explicitly stated information, actions, or ideas
- Make simple, straightforward inferences about characters' actions

Informational

When reading predominantly easy informational texts, students can:

- Locate, retrieve, and reproduce explicitly stated information
- Make simple, straightforward inferences to provide a reason for an outcome

Intermediate PIRLS International Benchmark (475)

Literary

When reading literary texts of easy or medium difficulty, students can:

- Locate, recognize, and reproduce explicitly stated actions, events, and feelings
- Make straightforward inferences about events and characters' actions
- Interpret reasons for characters' feelings or actions and identify supporting evidence

Informational

When reading informational texts or online tasks of easy or medium difficulty, students can:

- Locate, recognize, and reproduce explicitly stated information across texts
- Make straightforward inferences to provide comparisons, descriptions, and explanations
- Interpret and integrate to provide information about central ideas and reasons for actions, events, and outcomes

Reading Achievement at the International Benchmarks

Four PIRLS 2021 International Benchmarks

- Advanced **(625)**—A Difficult Target—**7%**

- High **(550)**—**36%**

- Intermediate **(475)**—**75%**

- Low **(400)**—**94%**

Percentages for Portugal are the same as the international median percentages based on 43 countries

Country	Percentages of Students Reaching International Benchmarks				Advanced Benchmark (625)	High Benchmark (550)	Intermediate Benchmark (475)	Low Benchmark (400)
	● Advanced	○ High	● Intermediate	○ Low				
³ Singapore					35 (1.4)	71 (1.6)	90 (0.9)	97 (0.5)
^{2†} Hong Kong SAR					21 (1.4)	68 (1.8)	92 (1.0)	98 (0.4)
Russian Federation					21 (1.3)	63 (2.0)	89 (1.4)	98 (0.4)
England μ					18 (1.2)	57 (1.3)	86 (0.9)	97 (0.4)
Bulgaria					16 (0.8)	49 (1.4)	78 (1.4)	93 (0.9)
² Sweden					15 (0.9)	50 (1.2)	81 (0.9)	95 (0.6)
Finland					14 (1.0)	53 (1.4)	84 (1.0)	96 (0.5)
Australia μ					14 (0.7)	48 (1.3)	80 (1.0)	94 (0.5)
Poland					14 (0.8)	52 (1.5)	85 (1.0)	97 (0.5)
[†] New Zealand					11 (0.8)	41 (1.1)	71 (1.0)	90 (0.6)
Czech Republic					11 (0.8)	47 (1.3)	82 (1.0)	96 (0.5)
^{2†} Denmark					11 (0.8)	48 (1.3)	81 (0.9)	96 (0.6)
Norway (5)					11 (0.6)	47 (1.3)	81 (1.0)	96 (0.6)
Chinese Taipei					10 (0.6)	50 (1.4)	85 (1.0)	97 (0.4)
Macao SAR					9 (0.7)	45 (0.7)	82 (0.6)	96 (0.4)
Germany					8 (0.7)	39 (1.2)	75 (1.1)	94 (0.5)
² Italy					8 (0.6)	44 (1.5)	83 (1.0)	97 (0.3)
³ Israel μ					8 (0.7)	35 (1.1)	67 (1.1)	88 (0.8)
[†] Slovak Republic					8 (0.8)	42 (1.7)	79 (1.2)	94 (0.8)
Malta					8 (0.6)	36 (1.3)	70 (1.4)	90 (0.9)
Austria					7 (0.7)	41 (1.6)	80 (1.2)	96 (0.4)
² Albania					7 (0.7)	33 (1.6)	69 (1.7)	92 (0.9)
[≠] Netherlands					6 (0.7)	37 (1.4)	79 (1.3)	96 (0.7)
Cyprus					6 (0.6)	32 (1.4)	69 (1.5)	92 (0.7)
² Portugal					6 (0.6)	36 (1.4)	75 (1.0)	94 (0.6)
Spain					6 (0.6)	35 (1.3)	76 (1.2)	95 (0.6)
² Turkiye					5 (0.5)	29 (1.3)	62 (1.7)	86 (1.2)
Slovenia					5 (0.5)	35 (1.1)	75 (1.1)	94 (0.5)
³ Serbia					5 (0.5)	33 (1.6)	73 (1.7)	93 (0.8)
France					5 (0.6)	32 (1.5)	72 (1.4)	94 (0.7)
Belgium (Flemish)					3 (0.5)	29 (1.5)	71 (1.4)	94 (0.5)
Oman					3 (0.4)	13 (1.0)	35 (1.4)	62 (1.4)
² Belgium (French)					3 (0.5)	23 (1.1)	62 (1.6)	89 (0.9)
³ Montenegro					2 (0.3)	21 (0.8)	59 (1.2)	87 (0.7)
^{2†} Brazil μ					2 (0.3)	13 (1.0)	37 (1.6)	61 (1.9)
North Macedonia					1 (0.3)	11 (1.1)	38 (2.5)	70 (2.2)
Azerbaijan					1 (0.2)	11 (0.9)	37 (1.7)	67 (1.5)
^{2ψ} Egypt					1 (0.2)	5 (0.7)	19 (1.4)	45 (2.0)
Jordan					1 (0.2)	5 (0.8)	22 (1.6)	47 (2.0)
[✱] South Africa μ					1 (0.2)	3 (0.5)	9 (0.9)	19 (1.2)
Iran, Islamic Rep. of μ					1 (0.2)	7 (0.6)	29 (1.5)	59 (2.0)
Uzbekistan					0 (0.1)	7 (0.7)	34 (1.3)	70 (1.4)
² Kosovo					0 (0.1)	5 (0.7)	27 (1.3)	62 (1.5)
International Median					7	36	75	94



PIRLS 2021 International Results

PIRLS Reading Achievement: Trends

Trends 2016-2021 32 Countries

3

Countries
Higher
Average
Achievement



8

Countries
Same
Average
Achievement



21

Countries
Lower
Average
Achievement



Trends 2011-2016 40 Countries

18

Countries
Higher
Average
Achievement



12

Countries
Same
Average
Achievement



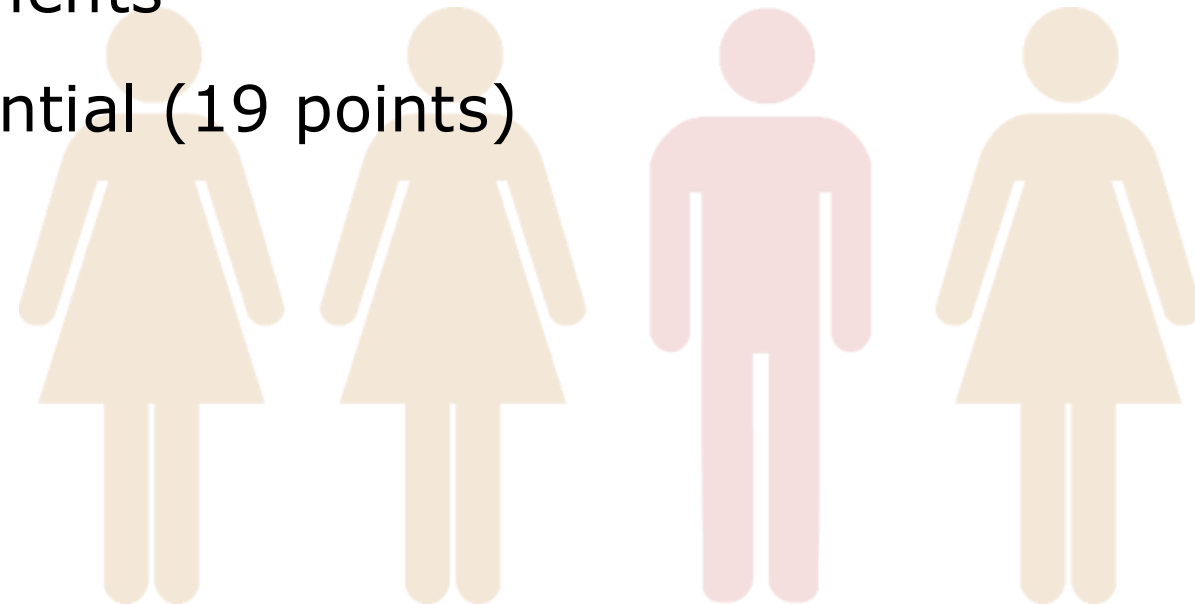
10

Countries
Lower
Average
Achievement



PIRLS Reading Achievement: Girls and Boys

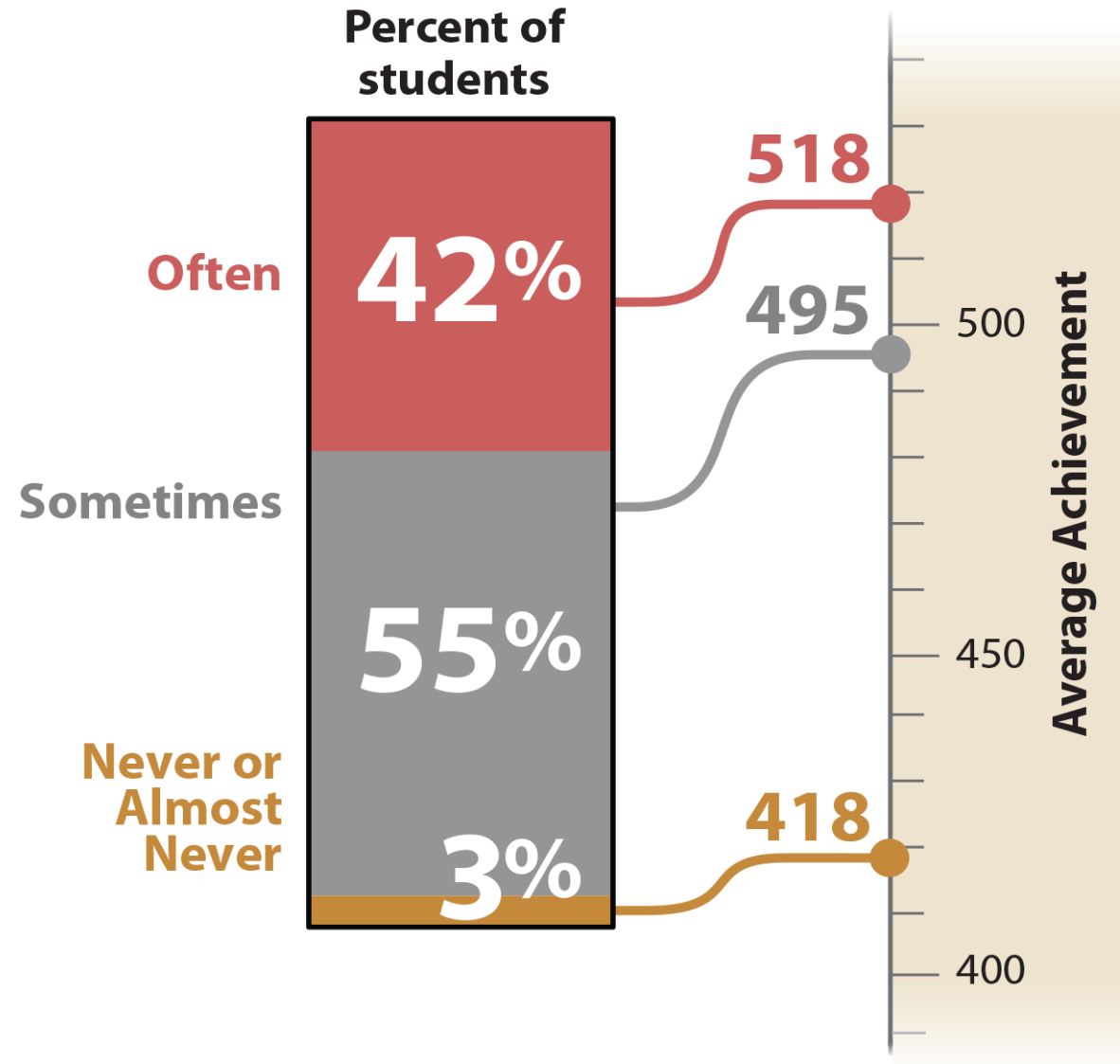
- Girls had higher reading achievement than boys in 51 of 57 countries
- Continues a long-standing pattern since PIRLS 2001, and evident in other reading assessments
- On average, the gap was substantial (19 points)



Home Early Literacy Activities Before Primary School

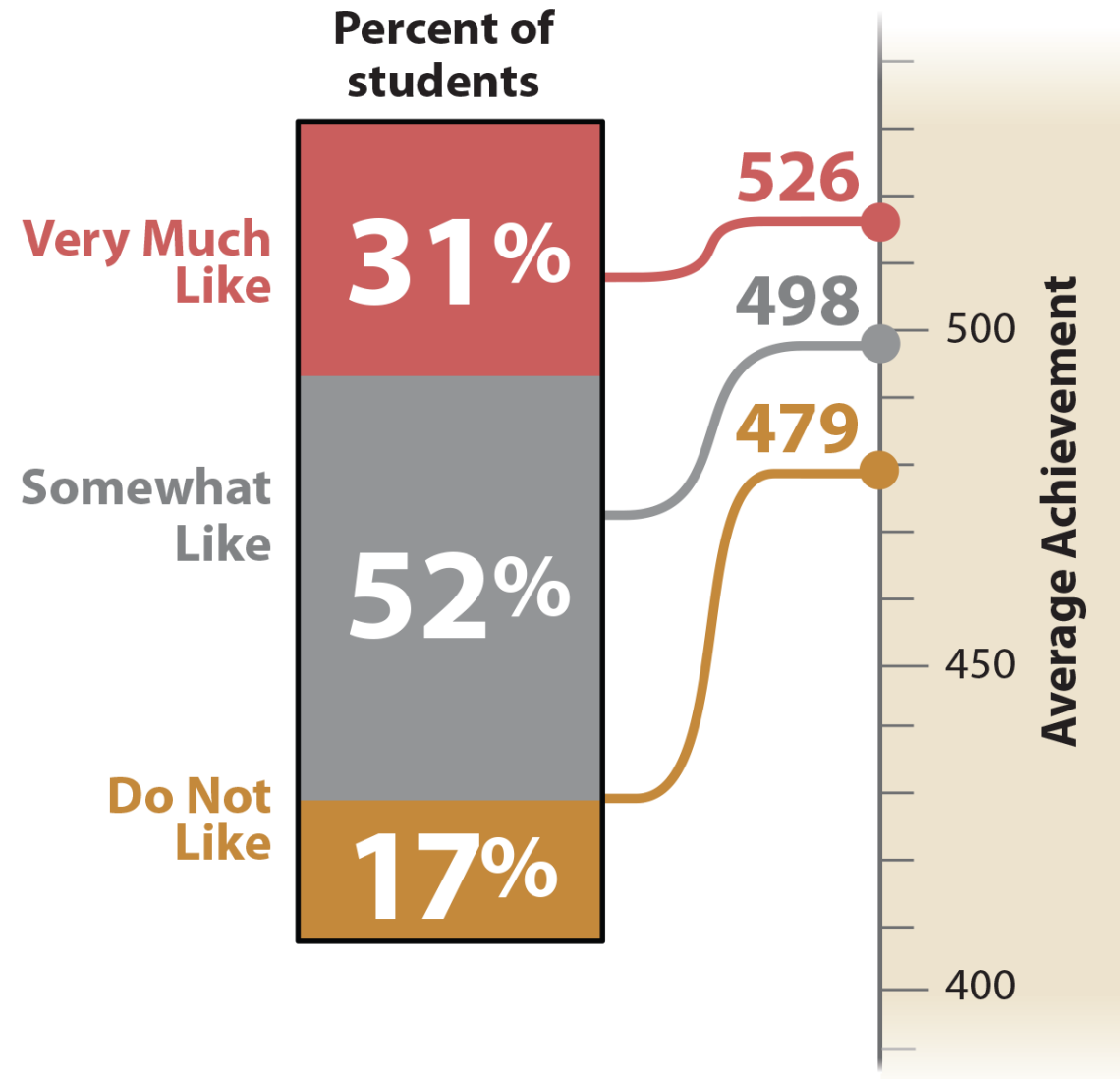
Based on reading, telling stories, singing songs, etc.

There is a strong relationship between early literacy activities and reading achievement, and most students' parents often or sometimes did early literacy activities with their children.



Parents Like Reading

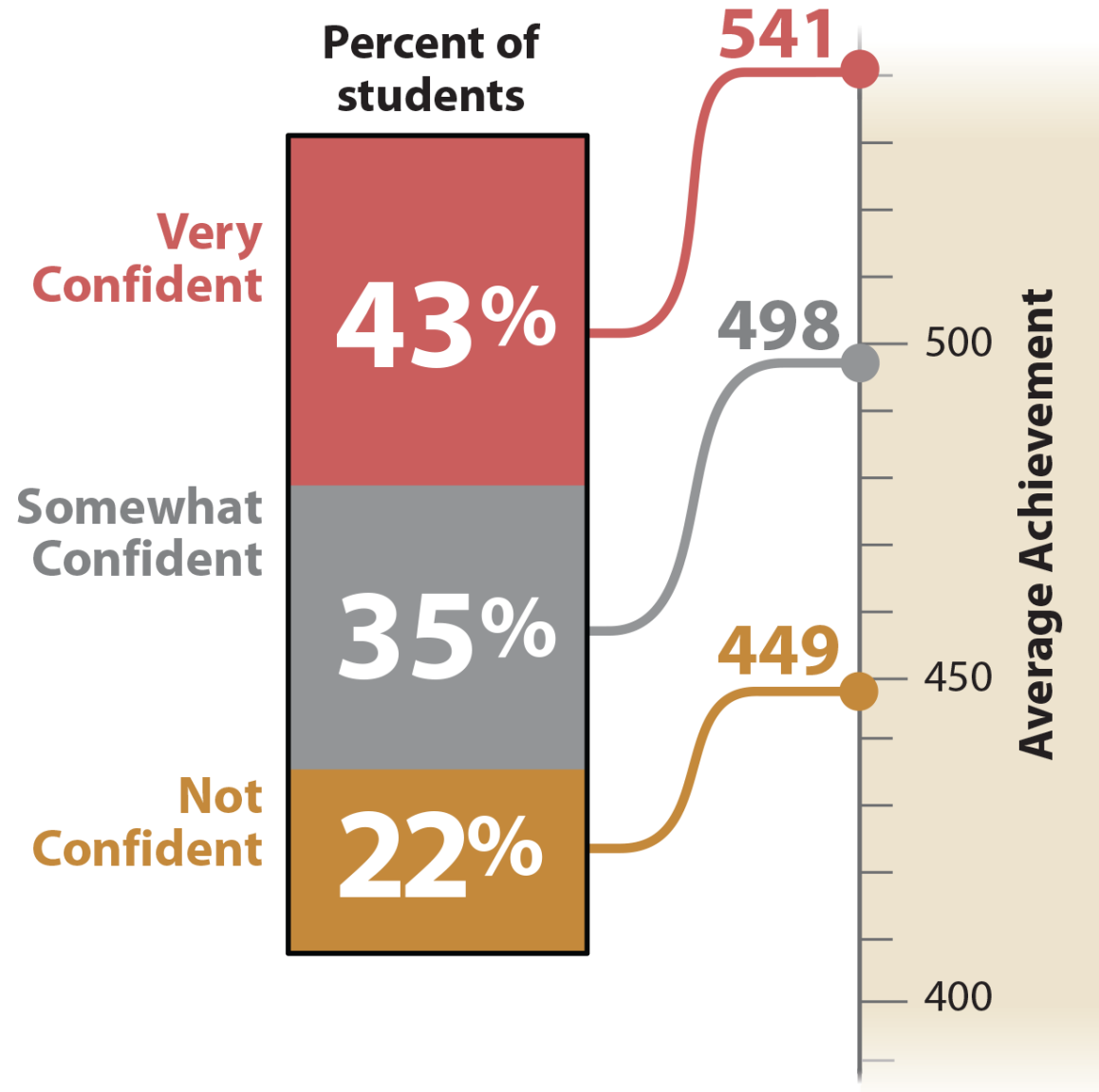
How much parents like reading has a positive relationship with students' reading achievement. On average, students whose parents very much like reading have higher reading achievement than students whose parents somewhat like reading or do not like reading.



Students Confident in Reading

Reported confidence in reading had a strong positive relationship with reading achievement.

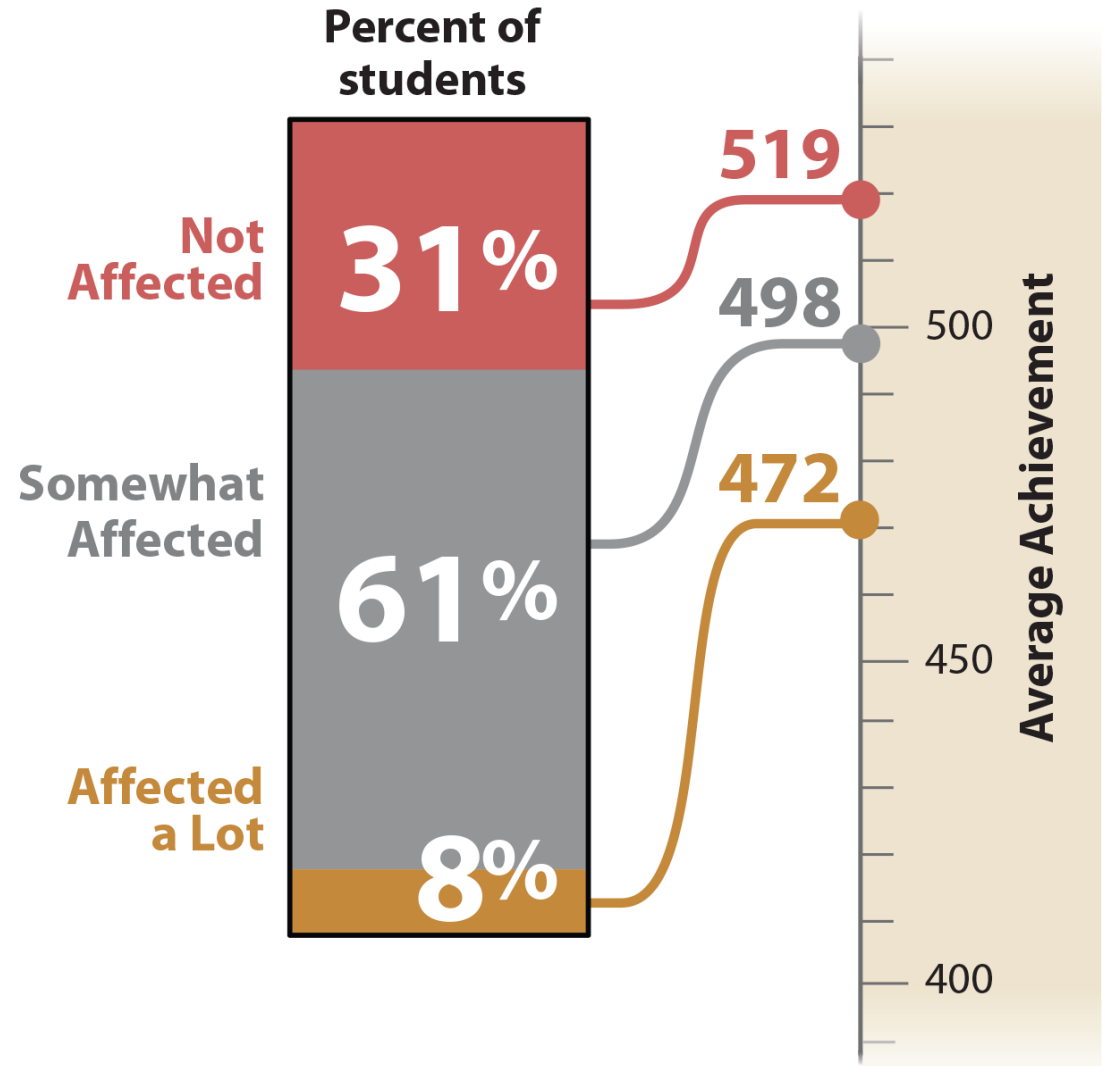
Students who are very confident in reading had higher reading achievement, on average, than students who were somewhat confident or not confident in reading.



Instruction Affected by Reading Resource Shortages

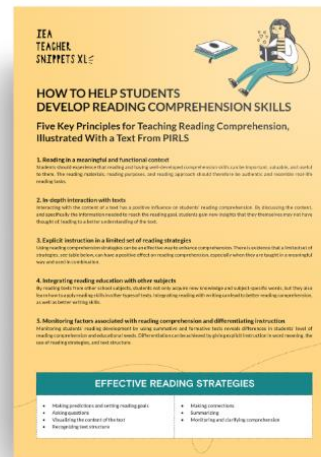
Most students attended schools that are either not affected or somewhat affected by reading resource shortages.

Students in schools that were not affected by reading resource shortages have higher reading achievement, on average, than students in schools that were somewhat affected or affected a lot.



IEA Publications Supporting Research and Policy Discussions

- PIRLS Insights Reports
- IEA Compass: Briefs in Education
- IEA Research for Educators
- IEA Teacher Snippets

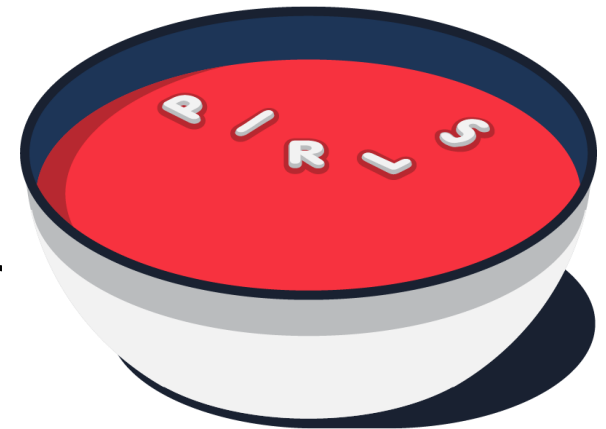


<https://pirls2021.org/insights/>
<https://www.iea.nl/publications>

Summary and PIRLS 2026

Summary

- PIRLS provides system-level monitoring in a global context.
- Countries can use PIRLS to evaluate curriculum reform and other strategies addressing several aspects of reading comprehension and factors related to reading achievement.
- PIRLS should be only ONE source used to inform education policy; enhancing available information from other assessments, case studies, and stakeholder conversations.



Upcoming PIRLS 2026 International Results and Database

- PIRLS 2026 is currently being administered in 57 countries
- The PIRLS 2026 Encyclopedia and Curriculum Questionnaire data will be available in November 2027
- International results will be published in December 2027
- The international database will be available to researchers in February 2028



Thank You!

