

Foreword

IEA (The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) implements large-scale assessments with partner organizations worldwide to better understand education practices, processes, policies, and educational outcomes. By providing expertise and continually innovating and improving sound research within its expanding global network, IEA studies provide a foundation for learning about education across and within these systems. IEA strives to improve quality teaching and learning around the world through the collection and provision of reliable, valid, and comparable data on a variety of subjects.

Investigations into reading comprehension have been conducted by IEA since as early as 1960, as it was one of the five subject domains assessed within the IEA Pilot Twelve-Country Study conducted with 13-year-olds. This evolved further in 1970 and 1971 under the umbrella of the Six Subject Survey, which assessed 14-year-olds in two areas of reading-related education: a continuation of reading comprehension as well as the additional topic of literature education. IEA also supported the Faculty of Education at the University of Hamburg in 1990 and 1991 in investigating the reading literacy of 14-year-olds in the Reading Literacy Study.

It was clear that the need for data on how well students were reading was essential to the utility of education data, and there was support to see this grow in a way that could measure trends over time in a consistent and reliable manner. This idea evolved into PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), which was launched in 2001 with 35 participants spanning five continents. Unlike its predecessors, this study focused on fourth-grade students in the critical period when they are traPye rdi8

From its origin, PIRLS has assessed the cognitive processes involved in comprehension, the various purposes that drive reading, and investigated the behaviors and attitudes that underlie reading literacy. Examining reading comprehension focuses on how students process and understand written information and the reasons they engage with texts. Meanwhile, the student questionnaire examines students' reading behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, the parent, teacher, and school questionnaires provide insights into the home and school environments that support or hinder reading literacy development.

PIRLS has continued to monitor progress in reading literacy every five years since 2001, with a steady increase in global participation that reached 65 education systems in 2021. The study's evolving design showcases the innovation and updates that keep each cycle at the forefront of research in education whilst still maintaining trend capabilities. This is exemplified in the shift from

I further extend my thanks for the high-quality creation of PIRLS 2026's assessment items and context questionnaires, led by the PIRLS team at Boston College, and supported by the outstanding expertise of international development partners as well as the PIRLS 2026 Reading Development Group and Questionnaire Development Group. The Expertisecentrum, Netherlands, as well as reading literacy experts from the University of Memphis, USA, also provided great assistance for PIRLS passages, and I am likewise grateful for the important sampling support from Research Triangle Institute International.

IEA's Publications and Editorial Committee, chaired by Seamus Hegarty, provided review and guidance for the authoring, reviewing, and publication process, while IEA's Technical Executive Group remained an important consultation source for technical aspects of the study to ensure sound design and implementation.

The high-quality information in *PIRLS 2026 Assessment Frameworks* is supported by many teams and individuals worldwide coming together. Thank you all for your contributions, insights, and hard work. I am especially thankful to the countries who chose to participate in this study. The commitment to collect scientifically sound data about the experiences of students, teachers, parents, principals, and schools remains at the heart of this important work. Thank you to each individual involved in this endeavor and became part of the tapestry that is PIRLS 2026 data.

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Introduction

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) has been monitoring international trends in reading achievement among fourth-grade students for 25 years. As a critical point in a student's education, the fourth year of schooling establishes the foundations of literacy, with reading becoming increasingly central to learning across all subjects.

PIRLS complements the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) at the fourth grade. Both studies are directed by the TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center at Boston College, which works closely with IEA Amsterdam and IEA Hamburg.

PIRLS serves as a cornerstone in assessing the reading proficiency of fourth graders, providing a critical benchmark to understand young learners' reading achievement in a dynamic global landscape. In 2021, PIRLS introduced a targeted assessment design developed to allow adaptivity of the difficulty of the assessment to match students' reading achievement in participating countries. This transition also included integrating interactive, digital reading formats through ePIRLS blocks that simulate web-based reading. Over half of the participants made the shift to a digital format, while a linking (bridge) sample facilitated the transition.

PIRLS 2026 represents a significant milestone in the assessment's history by completing the transition to a fully digital reading assessment. This move reflects PIRLS' commitment to leading the field and staying relevant in an era where digital literacy is essential for every child's education. By embracing the digital reading assessment format, PIRLS 2026 aims to create an engaging, authentic assessment experience that aligns with young learners' daily digital reading practices.