



THE EQUALIZER:

*How Education Creates Fairness
for Children in Canada*

UNICEF Report Card 15

Youth-Friendly Canadian Companion

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YOUTH-FRIENDLY CANADIAN COMPANION TO UNICEF REPORT CARD 15

The Equalizer: How Education Creates Fairness for Children in Canada

This Canadian Companion distills and interprets data for *UNICEF Report Card 15, Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries*. Visit unicef.ca/irc15 for these reports, infographics and background papers. Data sources and full references are cited in the Report Card.

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IN YOUR EDUCATION, FAIRNESS COUNTS AS MUCH AS GREATNESS

A message to children and youth from President and CEO David Morley

You might have heard that Canada does not do well in relation to other rich countries when it comes to child and youth well-being. However, I am very happy to report that Canada is one of the top 10 rich countries when it comes to educational equality. UNICEF Report Card 15 shows that Canada's public education system is very fair and helps many young people achieve.

Canada, like many other rich countries, has a gap in preschool attendance by Canadian children. However, once a child starts school, Canada's education systems work hard to close learning gaps. Between primary and secondary school the gap in achievement gets smaller compared to other rich countries, and most young people are thinking about further education. Migrant children tend to do well in school. The influence of family wealth on school achievement is not as strong as in most countries, and schools are much more inclusive.

But we also have challenges that we need to address. We leave too many boys behind. Too many Indigenous children, children of some racialized groups, children with disabilities and children in care are at the bottom of the education gap.

There are also growing threats to the fairness and high standards Canada achieves in education. Income inequality and its side-effects may stretch the education gap wider. But there are big opportunities to close the education gap we have while improving learning and broader well-being for young people on both sides of the gap.

What might Canada achieve if we did for every child in school what we do for so many?

What might Canada achieve if we invested in children's health and relationships, poverty

and food security in the same way we invest in education?

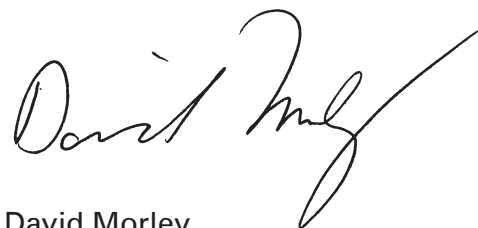
Canada would have more young people with good lives and great dreams.

Canada would be, measurably, among the best places in the world to grow up.

How can we make the possible achievable? Reducing income inequality and child poverty; expanding high-quality early childcare and learning; and continuing to strengthen school policies that work against inequality and make learning more inclusive and supportive of the well-being of every one of you.

This report is for you. If you want to take action, please join UNICEF Canada's One Youth campaign, bringing young people together with caring adults, organizations and decision-makers to understand and work on some of Canada's greatest challenges to children and youth well-being.

Sincerely,



David Morley
President and CEO
UNICEF Canada

UNICEF REPORT CARDS FOR YOUR GENERATION

UNICEF has produced 15 Report Cards over the past 18 years describing the rights and well-being of children and youth in rich countries. These report cards rank rich countries on how well they are doing for their children. We compare these countries because they have similar resources but create very different conditions for growing up. Usually, this is because of public policy: how societies use their wealth. We compare countries so they can learn and do better.

**UNICEF Report Card 15
is focused on equality in
education.**

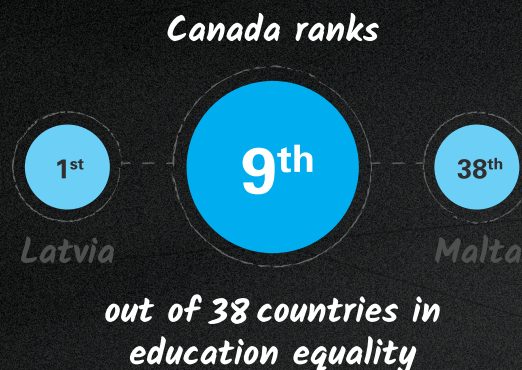
WHERE CANADA RANKS IN EDUCATION EQUALITY

CANADA'S OVERALL RANK	9 TH
Stage of Education (based on reading scores)	Canada's Rank
Preschool equality of access	22
Primary school equality of achievement	18
Secondary school equality of achievement	9
Equality in expectations of further education	9
Gender equality in secondary school	13
Equality of achievement of migrant children in secondary school	1
Inequality between primary schools	22
Inequality between secondary schools	10
Inequality in secondary schools due to family circumstances	6
Inequality in future expectations by family circumstances	4

7 IMPORTANT THINGS THIS REPORT CARD TELLS CANADIANS

1

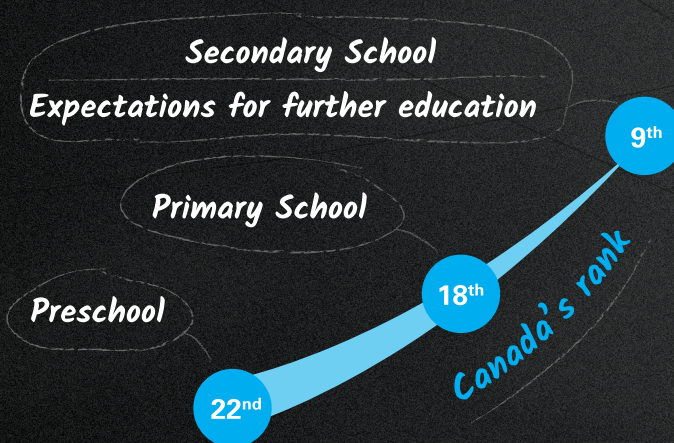
Canada's education system is one of the fairest among rich countries. This means that many students do well in school. There is a smaller gap in reading scores between Canada's children than between children in many other countries.



All provinces have greater educational equality than the average among rich countries.

2

The education system in Canada gets fairer as children progress through school compared to other rich countries. In about half the world's rich countries, schools get more unfair as children progress through school.



3

Education is not an equalizer for some children:

There is a reading gap that widens in favour of girls as children progress through school

Many First Nations children, children with disabilities, racialized children and children in care are left behind

Migrant children do just as well in reading achievement in secondary school as Canadian-born children

Canada has a relatively high level of equality in education compared to peer countries because:

In Canada, if you come from a rich family, it doesn't have as much of an influence on your education as it might in other countries.

There is less difference in achievement between schools.

Reasons why include:



Canada spends more money on education and making sure provincial and territorial education systems are equal.



Public education systems spread quality teaching and resources across schools, instead of investing much more in some schools and much less in others.



Students are not selected into schools as much as in other countries – there is more student diversity in schools by income, gender, ethnicity, ability and in other ways.



Public schools have a range of inclusive policies and programs.

Countries like Canada with greater educational equality also have higher levels of achievement – there is no tradeoff between fairness and greatness. A more equal system pulls all students up.



Fairness = Greatness

Canada must do better for children at both ends of our education inequality gap.

There are things that could drag us down that we need to pay attention to (threats to educational equality):

Income inequality and related effects

How students are grouped between and in schools (school stratification)

The private investment gap in children's education, such as fundraising and tutoring (shadow education)

There are things we need to continue to work on to stay at the top (big opportunities to sustain and improve Canada's educational equality):

Reduce income inequality

Guarantee high quality early child learning and care for every child

Close the achievement gaps between children in schools and have a reconciliation framework to close gaps for Indigenous children

Expand learning for the future – the new basics

Make learning environments safer and healthier (reduce bullying, provide school meals and support well-being)

If Canada brought to other aspects of child and youth well-being the shared commitment we have to a good education, many more children would be healthy, free of violence and able to dream about and reach their full potential.



What is **Inequity**?

While inequality relates to differences, inequity relates to differences that are unfair. Educational inequities are differences in education opportunities and results that stem from different and unfair circumstances and advantages available to children. These include having more family wealth or more resources in some schools than in others.

Preschool: *the percentage of students enrolled in organized learning one year before the official age for entering primary school.* This is a measure of equality of access to preschool education rather than equality of outcomes at this age. In Canada, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) provides insight about equality in developmental outcomes at the start of school, but there is no internationally comparable data for the EDI.

Primary school: *the gap in reading scores between the lowest and highest performing students at fourth grade (at the 10th and 90th percentiles) (from PIRLS survey data).*

Secondary school: *the gap in reading scores between the lowest and highest performing students at age 15 (at the 10th and 90th percentiles) (from PISA survey data).*

See UNICEF Report Card 15 for more detail on these measures and their data sources.

U-REPORT

We used U-Report Canada to ask young people for their perspectives on various topics related to education. Keep your eye out for this icon to see what young people in Canada are thinking.



U-Report is a polling chatbot developed by UNICEF Canada for youth ages 13-24. U-Report gathers youth voice and perspective on issues they care about to influence positive change. U-Report is a unique opportunity to get a quick and real-time pulse check of young people's views for a range of purposes, such as to understand how different groups of youth are being affected by decisions, policies, services and events, and to involve youth in decisions that affect them. Seeking the views of young people supports better decision-making affecting a large constituency – a quarter of the population in Canada is under age 18. The responses in this report are a “straw poll” of 98 U-Reporters in August 2018.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report Canada.

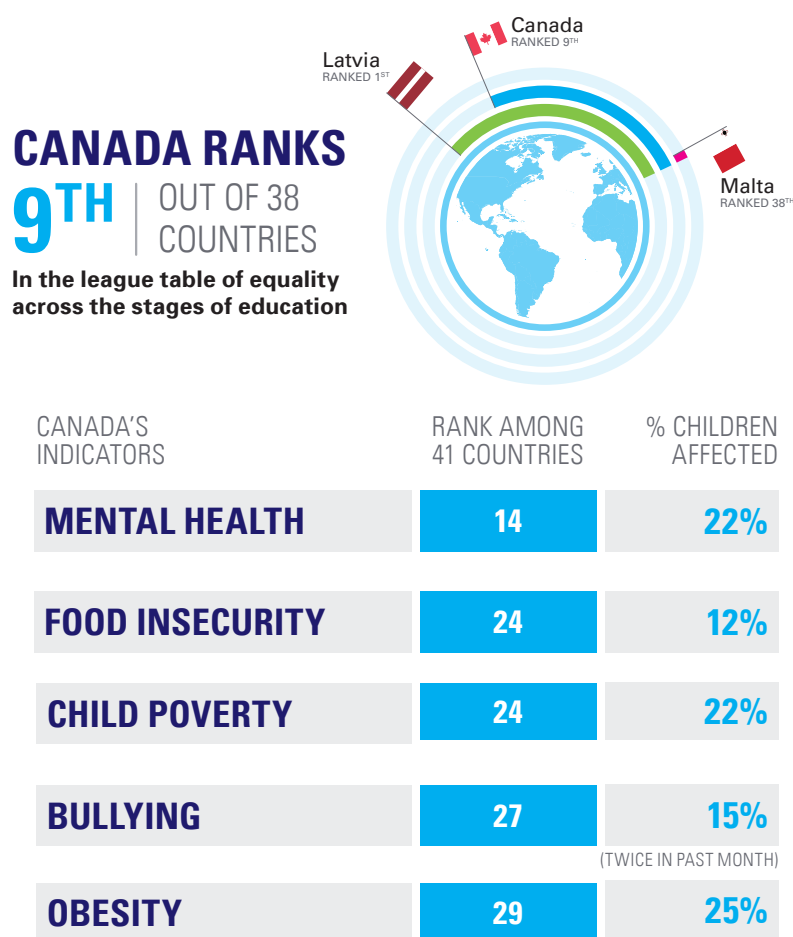
MEASURING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF A GENERATION

Since UNICEF began to monitor and compare the state of children and youth in wealthy countries a generation ago, we have measured the negative impacts of widening income and social inequality on Canada's youth. Widening inequality is one of the reasons why Canada trails behind other rich countries in children's health, the violence they experience and the rate of child poverty (see figure 1).

But Canada usually tops the international rankings in education. In UNICEF Report Card 15, Canada is among the top 10 of the world's 38 richest countries in the ranking of inequality in education. Canada also stands out because educational inequality decreases as children progress through school compared to other countries. Canada rises from a rank of 22 for equality in preschool access (in the middle third of countries), to a middle rank of 18 for equality in primary school reading achievement, to a rank of 9 in secondary school reading achievement and in expectations for further education (among the top third of countries)¹.

We focus on **reading scores** to measure educational inequality because reading is a gateway to all learning, not because math, science and other subjects are less important. But Canada ranks in the top 10 countries for math and science as well as reading.

Figure 1: The well-being of Canada's children and youth



Data from UNICEF Report Card 14 (2017).

¹ The indicators of educational inequality at each stage of school are different. The first is preschool participation, which contributes to wide variation in readiness to learn. The next two indicators are reading achievement in primary school and in high school, followed by expectations high school students have of pursuing further education. They are not directly comparable to each other, but the extent to which children have different access, achievement and expectations are markers of inequality as each influences the next along the life course, and each is influenced to some extent by unfair circumstances.



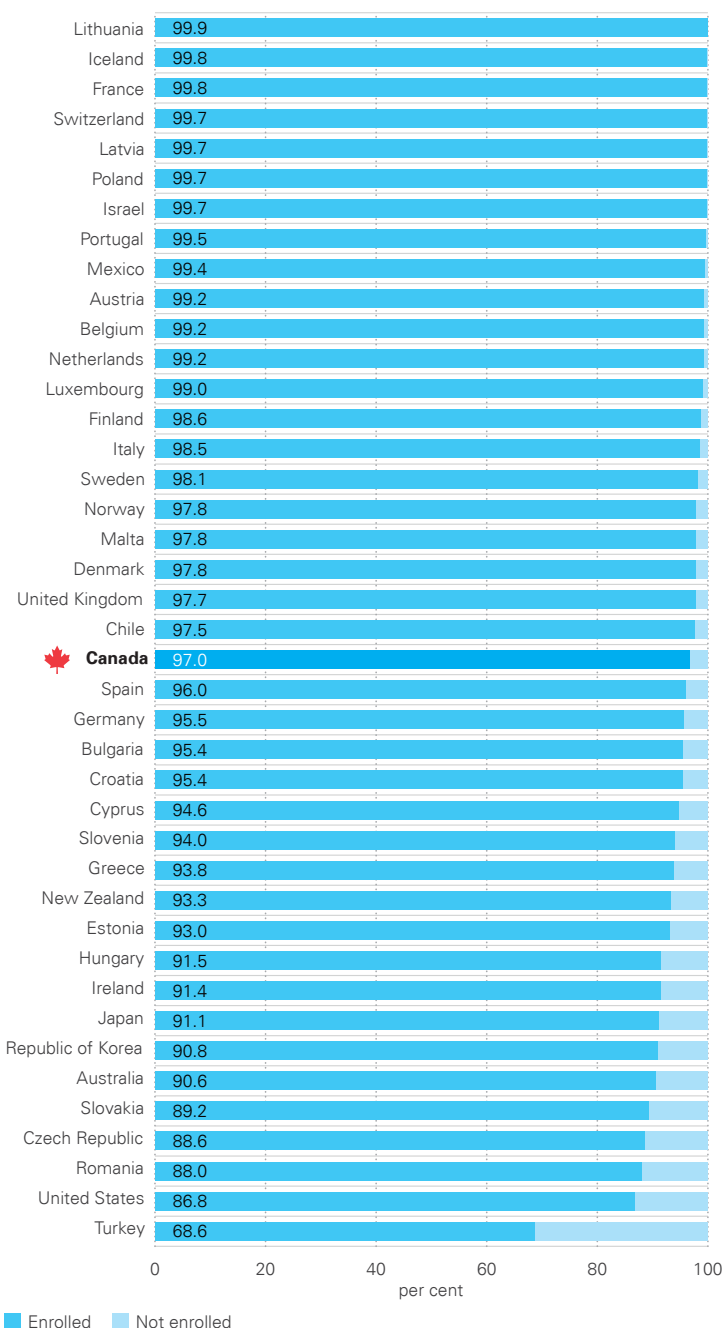
WHAT HAPPENS IN PRESCHOOL?

Canada ranks **22nd** based on how many children attend preschool compared to other rich countries.

A child's journey through the education system usually begins in childcare (daycare) or preschool². Most of Canada's kids (**97%**) are in preschool the year before primary school (Kindergarten for most children)³. That's a lot, but more kids are left out in Canada than in most other rich countries.

WHY? Many children are left out because childcare is expensive and because it's not always available. That is because it is not always provided as a public system like education for older kids.

Figure 2: How many children attend preschool?



² Report Card 15 uses the terms preschool and childcare interchangeably to refer to all forms of centre-based early childhood education and care. The divide between care and preschool education is blurred in many countries, but it is still common to think of services for under-3s as childcare and those for children age 3 and older as preschool. However, it is notable that in Canada, early child education has two streams. Preschool is universal, publicly funded and delivered, with no tuition. Childcare is largely privately delivered with varying levels of public subsidy with wide variation in availability and fees.

³ Updated figures are available from Statistics Canada post-dating the gathering of data for this report, reporting an enrolment rate of 97% in 2015 (the previously reported 2015 figure was 95%) www144.statcan.gc.ca/sdg-odd/goal-objectif04-eng.htm. Due to timing of the update we are not able to incorporate this in the core UNICEF Report Card calculations.



Here are some reasons for Canada's ranking:

Family circumstances matter to equality in preschool

Around **60%** of Canadian families have to pay for daycare, and the cost in places like Toronto is up to a third of a family's income.

Children living in lower income households are less likely to attend preschool or daycare. These are the children who often benefit the most from early learning.

Availability of early learning opportunities matters to equality in preschool

Provinces that spend more money on early childhood education and care usually have more kids in preschool and more childcare spaces.

44% of all young children in Canada live in childcare deserts (areas where there isn't enough good quality childcare). In these areas, there are usually around 3 children in competition for a single daycare spot.

Being in preschool or daycare helps children learn physical, social, emotional, language and communication skills, which helps them succeed when they start school. Thousands of young children in Canada start school without the long-term advantages of early learning that could put many on a better path for school and for life. A public, universal system of education for young children would really help, just like older kids have.

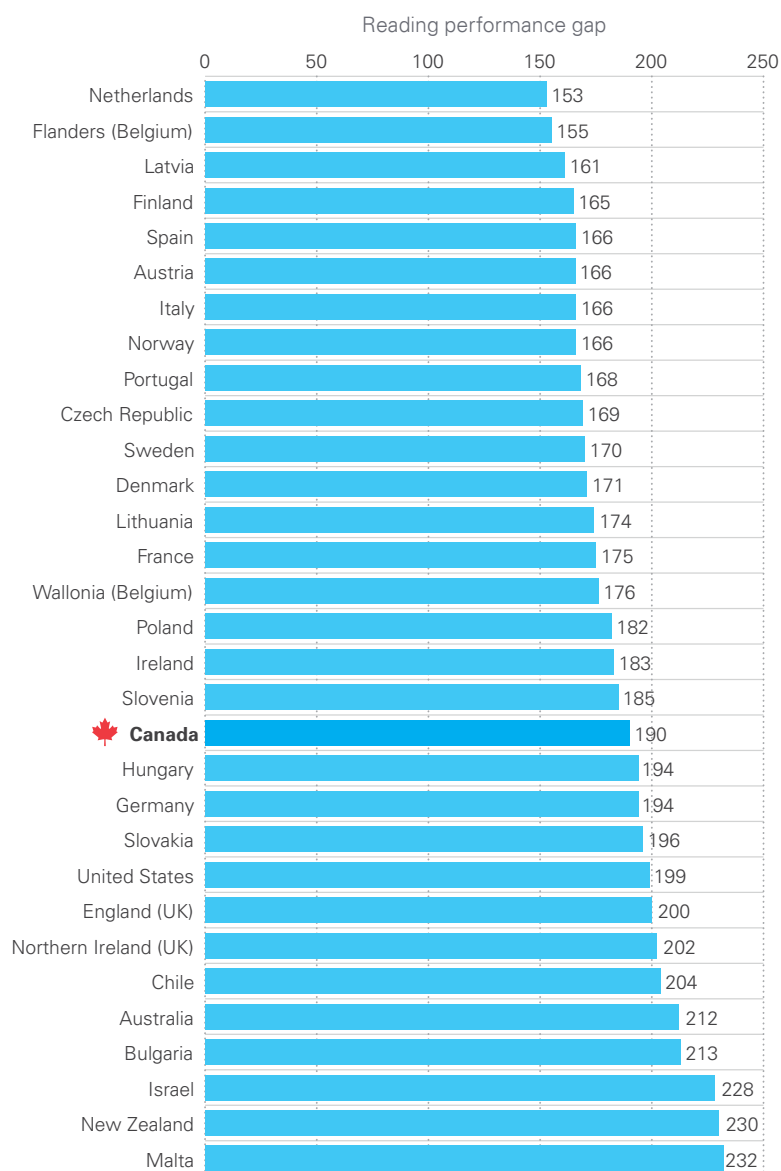
WHAT HAPPENS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Canada ranks **18th** based on how equally Canadian children can read in Grade 4 compared to other rich countries.

In Grade 4 there is a wide gap between children in their reading scores (see figure 3).

WHY? In Canada, when children start school they have big differences in their skills and readiness to learn⁴. In Grade 4, **83%** of kids reach a basic reading level, but there is a gap between kids with high reading scores and kids with low scores. Some rich countries have much smaller gaps in reading scores between students. This tells us that wider gaps aren't because of differences in kids' "natural abilities". Family wealth and school differences play a role.

Figure 3: Where are the widest gaps in Grade 4 reading ability (2016)?



⁴ The analysis draws on data from the latest round of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2016). This is a large scale international assessment of fourth grade children's reading comprehension. It tests nationally representative samples of approximately 4,000 fourth-grade students from 150 to 200 schools per country or territory. An average fourth grade child across the 31 school systems is 10 years old.

Here are some reasons for Canada's ranking:

Family circumstances matter to equality in primary school

How much money a child's family has influences their learning and how well they do in school.

- Children with at least one parent working in a managerial, higher-paying job are more likely to have higher reading scores in primary school in almost every country.
- Differences in parents' jobs, a child's gender, the language of school tests compared to the language the child speaks at home, the location of the school and whether a child comes to school hungry or tired are big reasons for the gaps in children's reading scores.

Schools matter to equality in primary school

Educational inequality (the size of the reading gap) between children can be better or worse depending on the schools they attend. Canada ranks 22nd out of 31 countries in between-school inequality (the differences in reading scores from school to school). This is because reading scores in some primary schools are much better than in others.

- When schools produce very different reading test scores, it is usually because they group better performing and lower performing children into different schools.
- This can happen where there are richer and poorer neighbourhoods, and schools in more disadvantaged areas don't get more resources to offset the challenges they have.
- Some schools select students by academic ability, family wealth, religious affiliation or other differences. This can

occur in both private/independent and in public schools.

- The stratification of students (when children with the same social and economic position are clustered together into different schools) contributes to educational inequality. This is because children with fewer advantages do better when they go to schools with more diversity. Grouping kids into different schools based on wealth or other differences can also weaken a society's sense of togetherness.

How much does access to preschool matter to equality in primary school?

The wide gap in educational inequality in primary school in Canada may be partly because of unequal access to preschool. Canadian babies are pretty much the same at birthⁱ, but by the time they start school, poverty and other disadvantages contribute to gaps in their health and the skills they have learned.

- Early language learning sets the foundation for literacy, numeracy and creative thinking.
- At Kindergarten, **33%** of boys and **19%** of girls show delays in health, language or self-confidence.ⁱⁱ
- Children who start school behind their more advantaged classmates find it harder to catch up. For some, the difficulties they experience at school entry are likely to grow rather than lessen over time.ⁱⁱⁱ These gaps can be closed, but schools struggle to find the expertise and funding to help children make up for what they missed in their earliest years.

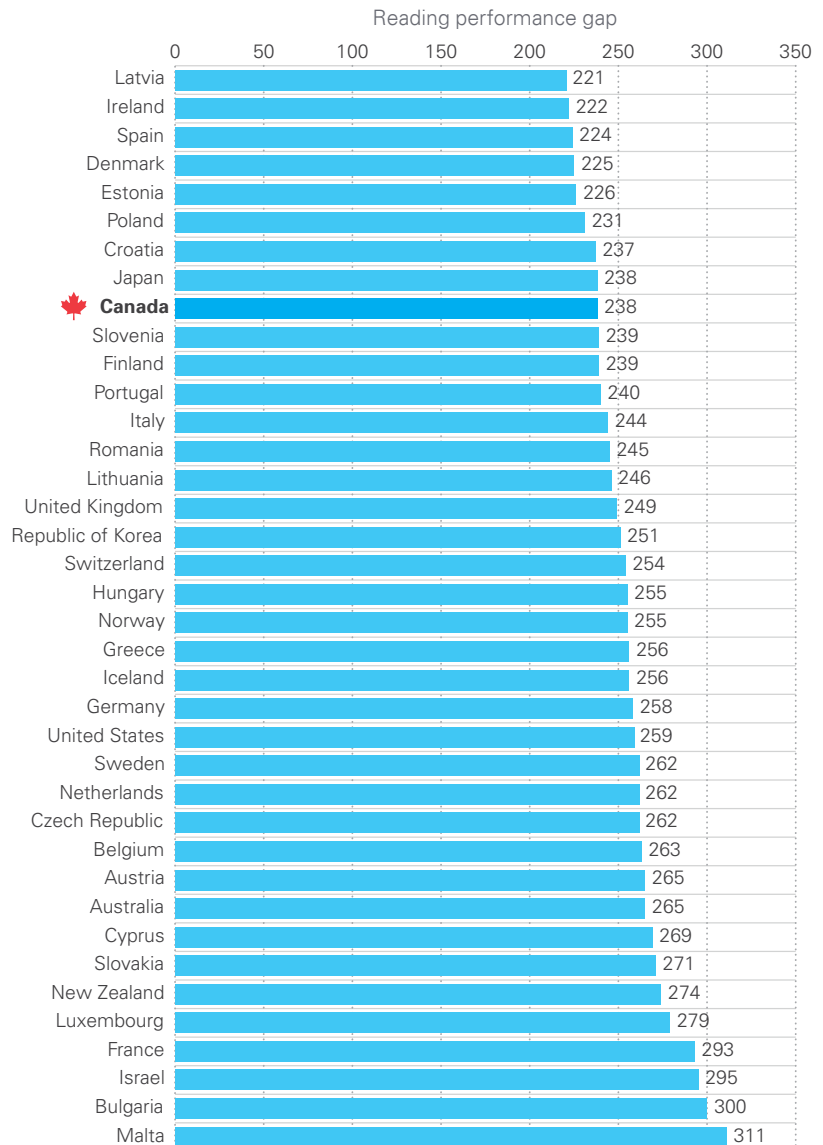
WHAT HAPPENS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL?

Canada ranks **9th** based on how equally Canadian children can read in at age 15 compared to other rich countries.

In high school at age 15, the gap in reading scores is smaller in Canada compared to peer countries (see figure 4). Canada's equality ranking rises from 18th place to 9th place. However, in many countries the reading gap becomes wider as children progress through school.

WHY? Canada's education systems invest a lot in education and share resources pretty evenly between schools, enabling more young people to learn to read. Every Canadian province has both a smaller gap in reading scores in high school, and more young people achieving a basic reading level (**89%**), than many other rich countries. The number of students who can pass the basic reading level ranges from **83%** in Manitoba to **92%** in British Columbia. This is more than the rich country average of **78%**. Seven of the 10 provinces meet or pass the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal for "reading proficiency" (achieving a basic level of reading of **86%**).

Figure 4: Where are the widest gaps in reading ability at age 15 (2015)?



Here are some reasons for Canada's ranking:

Family circumstances matter to equality in secondary school

Canada ranks **6th** based on the influence of parents' incomes on reading scores in high school.

- Canada's education system works very hard to make sure family circumstances have as little influence on educational achievement as possible, even though poverty and inequality are higher in Canada than in many peer countries.^{iv}
- In all countries, children with higher-earning parents tend to have higher reading scores in secondary school than those with low-earning parents. The differences are much larger in some countries than others.
- In most countries, parents' jobs and earnings are a bigger reason for educational inequalities between high schools than are school factors.
- All provinces limit the influence of family wealth better than most other rich countries. However, provinces with a wider gap in children's family wealth tend to have a wider high school reading score gap.

Schools matter to equality in secondary school

Canada ranks **10th** based on the reading gap between schools.

- There is a smaller difference in reading scores between high schools than there is between primary schools in Canada. It seems that the efforts schools make to help more children achieve show results by high school.
- In Canada, about **82%** of the inequality in reading scores is between children within high schools, and only around **18%** of the inequality is between schools. This tells us that there isn't that much difference in achievement from school to school (compared to other countries). But there are still pretty wide gaps in achievement among kids in the same school.
- This makes it important to look at how to close gaps between children in the same school.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF STREAMING?

What is streaming? Grouping children based on their abilities or grades.

Some countries have a lot of schools that create different learning tracks to prepare students for different destinations such as college, university, an apprenticeship program or going directly into the workplace. This can take the form of 'streaming' young people into different classes or 'setting' them into different groups within classes. This may apply to all subjects or to selected subjects.

- Grouping children by their abilities or grades is widely used in Canada.
- Canada ranks 36th out of 41 rich countries in the prevalence of streaming, meaning more schools practice it here than in most other countries. Over **86%** of schools in Canada use some form of streaming in contrast to the rich country average of **45%**.
- You might think that given Canada's strong education results, streaming might contribute to better results, or at least have a limited role in creating inequalities.
- Supporters of streaming believe it allows schools to design a better course of studies for students in each track.
- Opponents say it increases inequalities without increasing achievement for lower achieving students.⁵

U-REPORT: Making Choices in School

We asked young people for their experiences and opinions of streaming. Here's what they told us:



- More than half of students (**58%**) say they always or often get to make choices about school (e.g., what school you go to, what courses you take, etc.). **42%** say they sometimes, rarely or never get to make choices.
- Half of students (**50%**) would like to make choices about their courses, above other choices they might make in their education. About one in five (**22%**) would like to be able to choose the kind of track/stream (academic or applied) they are in.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report.

5 Hanushek, E.A., L. Woessmann (2006): Does Educational Tracking Affect Performance and Inequality? Differences-in-Differences Evidence Across Countries. Economic Journal, Vol. 116, pp. C363 - C376.

Interesting facts about **streaming**

- There are more children from less privileged families in the lower streams. In Ontario, students in lower income neighbourhoods as well as Indigenous and Black students are more likely to be in applied streams^v. More than **80%** of Grade 9 students in the academic math stream in Ontario meet the provincial standard, while only **44%** of students in the applied math stream do.
- Lots of students get very good grades even when they are in blended ability classrooms.
- Streaming often takes place when students are too young to show their potential. In Canada, streaming starts as early as age 13 (Grade 9), based on grades in Grade 8.
- Streaming is usually decided by the school's recommendation. Even if the recommendation can be challenged by parents, **children have little say**, and it takes some effort, knowledge and resources to do that.
- Children don't have much flexibility to change tracks as they progress through high school.
- Some countries with good educational achievement and equality manage to do it without widespread ability streaming.

FAIRNESS IN EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

Children who move to a new country often face challenges like adapting to a different way of life, making new friends, learning a new language and integrating into a new school system. Their family's economic situation may have been affected by their move. They could have experienced trauma before or during their journey.

In Canada, more than a third of students are from families where both parents are from another country. **So how do child immigrants or the children of immigrants do in school?**⁶

Migrant children do well in Canadian schools:

- Canada is one of the few countries where migrant children achieve as well as other children, ranking first among rich countries. In most countries, first-generation immigrant children have far lower reading scores than non-immigrant children.
- Second-generation immigrant children also have far lower reading scores than non-immigrant children in 15 countries, while in Canada and Australia they do better than their non-immigrant peers.
- Around **10%** of migrant children in Canada do not reach the basic reading level.
- First-generation immigrant students in Canada report a stronger sense of belonging at school than non-immigrant students. This is opposite the pattern in most rich countries except Australia.
- Canada also has the highest number of first-generation immigrant students who expect to earn a university degree (**80%**).

Who are migrant children?

We use three categories to define immigration status (based on OECD definitions):

1. Non-immigrant students are children who have at least one parent who was born in the country, no matter whether the child was born there.
2. First-generation immigrant students are foreign-born children whose parents are also both foreign-born.
3. Second-generation immigrant students are children who were born in the country and whose parents are both foreign-born.

Why do immigrant children do better in school in Canada compared to other countries?

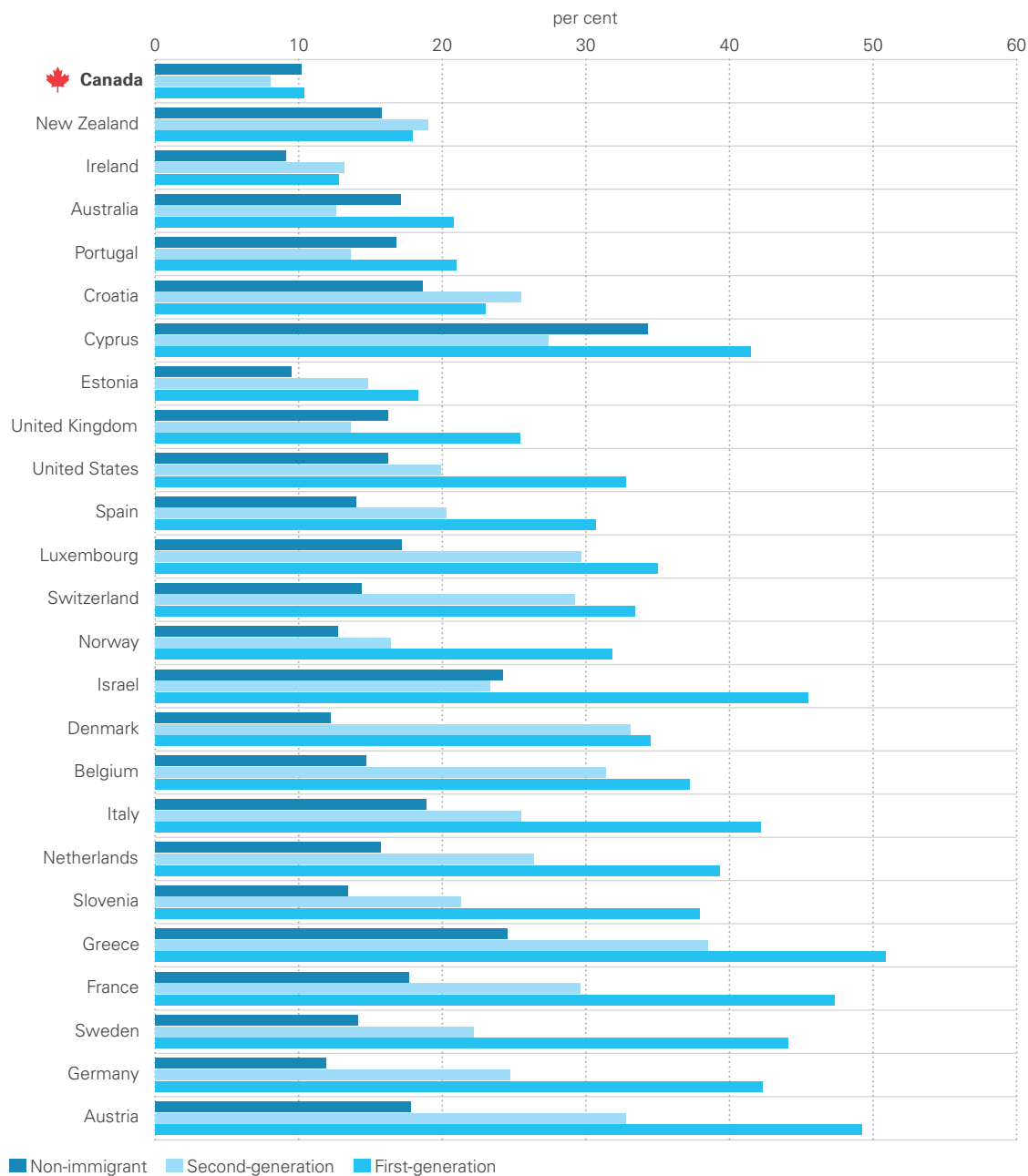
There are a couple reasons that might help to explain this:

- Canada, Australia and New Zealand are 'settlement countries' where immigration is part of the heritage of the country. Many immigrants are highly educated and wealthier than they are in other countries.
- Canada's education systems work hard to integrate children with different languages and countries of origin through special programs and a focus on inclusion.
- Canadian schools typically respect the rights of children by enrolling students regardless of their migration status.

⁶ We answer this question using reading scores for 15-year-olds in 23 countries where at least 5% of children are immigrants.

Figure 5: Children's migration status has far less influence on their reading proficiency in some countries

Percentage of 15-year-olds by migrant status who had not reached Level 2 proficiency in reading (2015)



Source: PISA 2015.

FAIRNESS IN EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AND BOYS

There are differences in educational achievement between girls and boys in every country. Gender gaps appear in the early years⁷ and they tend to grow⁸. These gaps can be different for different subjects. In Canada, girls do better than boys in reading in primary and secondary school.

- In all countries, girls tend to have higher reading scores than boys, and in all countries gender inequality widens between primary and secondary school.
- The size of the gender gap in Canada in secondary school ranks 13th, in the middle among peer countries and slightly better than the average.
- Girls score higher than boys in reading in all Canadian provinces.
- There is a gender gap in high school graduation in Canada, with only **84%** of males graduating compared to **91%** of females^{vi}.
- Girls tend to have higher expectations than boys of going to university in most rich countries, and so more girls than boys participate in higher education.⁹

Figure 6: Girls outperform boys in reading in all countries

The percentage by which girls score higher than boys in reading at Grade 4 and at 15 years old (2015)

Country	Grade 4 (PIRLS)	15 years old (PISA)	Gender Gap Rank
Ireland	2.1%	2.3%	1
Belgium	2.1%	3.3%	2
Italy	1.4%	3.4%	3
Portugal	(0.3%)	3.4%	4
USA	1.5%	4.1%	5
Germany	2.1%	4.2%	6
Spain	1.6%	4.2%	7
Austria	1.1%	4.3%	8
Denmark	2.4%	4.5%	9
UK	2.7%	4.5%	10
Netherlands	1.9%	4.8%	11
Israel	2.5%	4.9%	12
Canada 🇨🇦	2.2%	5.1%	13
Hungary	2.3%	5.4%	14
Czech Republic	1.9%	5.5%	15
France	1.5%	6.0%	16
Poland	3.2%	6.0%	17
Australia	4.0%	6.5%	18
New Zealand	4.2%	6.5%	19
Norway	3.9%	8.1%	20
Slovakia	1.7%	8.2%	21
Sweden	2.8%	8.2%	22
Lithuania	3.8%	8.6%	23
Slovenia	3.5%	8.9%	24
Latvia	3.1%	9.0%	25
Finland	3.9%	9.2%	26
Malta	4.7%	9.9%	27
Bulgaria	2.9%	11.5%	28

Source: PISA 2015. *Unfortunately we don't have data for those who identify outside of the gender binary.

What about other subjects?

Math: There is no math gender gap in Canada. But boys in most countries tend to score higher than girls in high school math.

Science: In Canada, boys do slightly better than girls in high school science. In some countries, boys do better than girls. In other countries, girls do better than boys.

7 Mensah, F. & Kiernan, K. (2010). Gender differences in educational attainment: influences of the family environment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 239-260.

8 Bradbury, B., Corak, M., Waldfogel, J., & Washbrook, E. (2015). *Too Many Children Left Behind: The U.S. Achievement Gap in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

9 OECD (2017) *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

Canada ranks **9th** based on how equally Canadian young people have expectations for further education compared to other rich countries.

When asked what level of education they expect to complete, at age 15 many young people have ideas not only about what they hope to do in the future, but also what they might realistically expect to do.

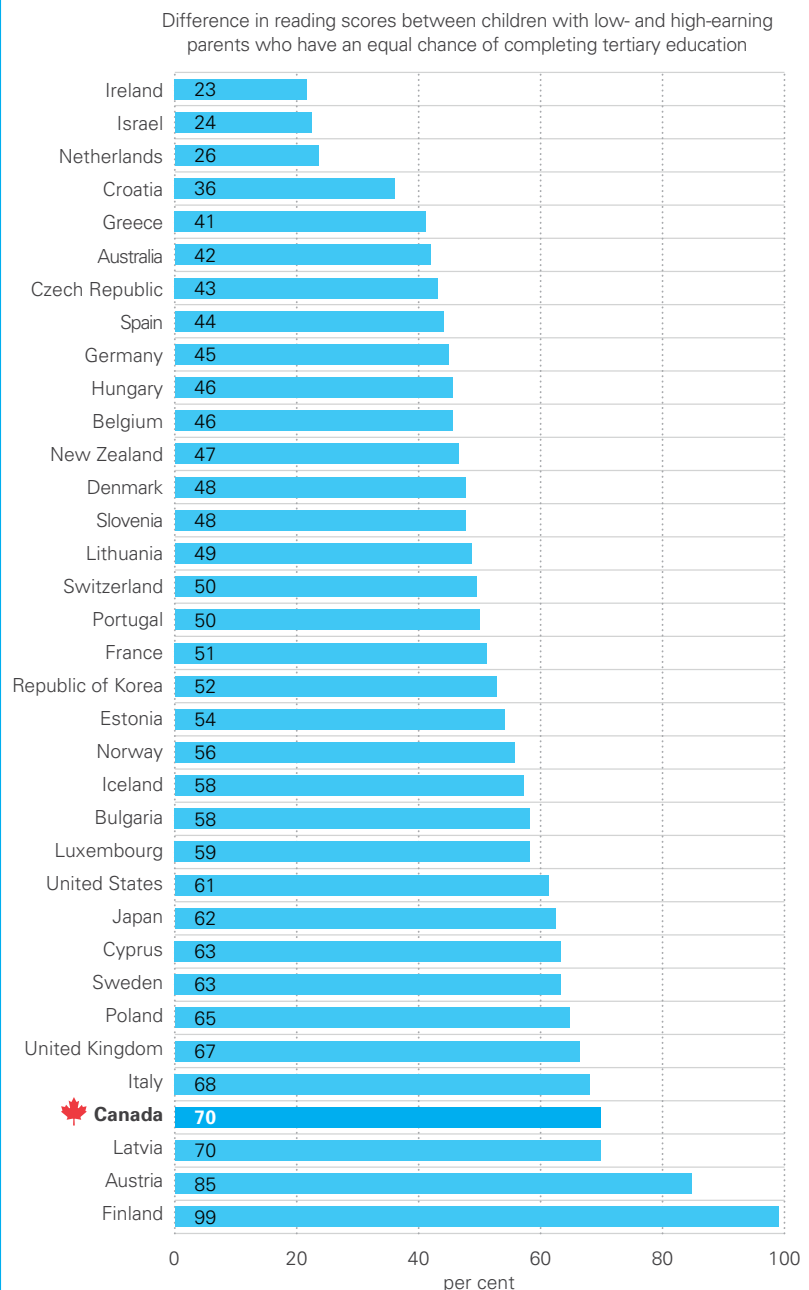
Overall, Canada's young people have fairly high expectations of attending post-secondary school.

- Close to **80%** of children in Canada say they expect to go to college or university.
- Expectations range from less than **20%** in Germany and the Netherlands to just under **90%** in Korea.

Aspirations and expectations are shaped by what came before the end of high school, and the opportunities provided by further education and employment. Family wealth affects expectations. Gender has an influence. While further education is a right in some countries (such as having free tuition), it is not a right in Canada. Post-secondary education costs and location affect expectations.

Figure 7: Difference in reading scores between children of different levels of family affluence with similar expectations of completing tertiary education

Average reading score gap between children of low- and high-earning parents with the same expectations of tertiary education (2015)



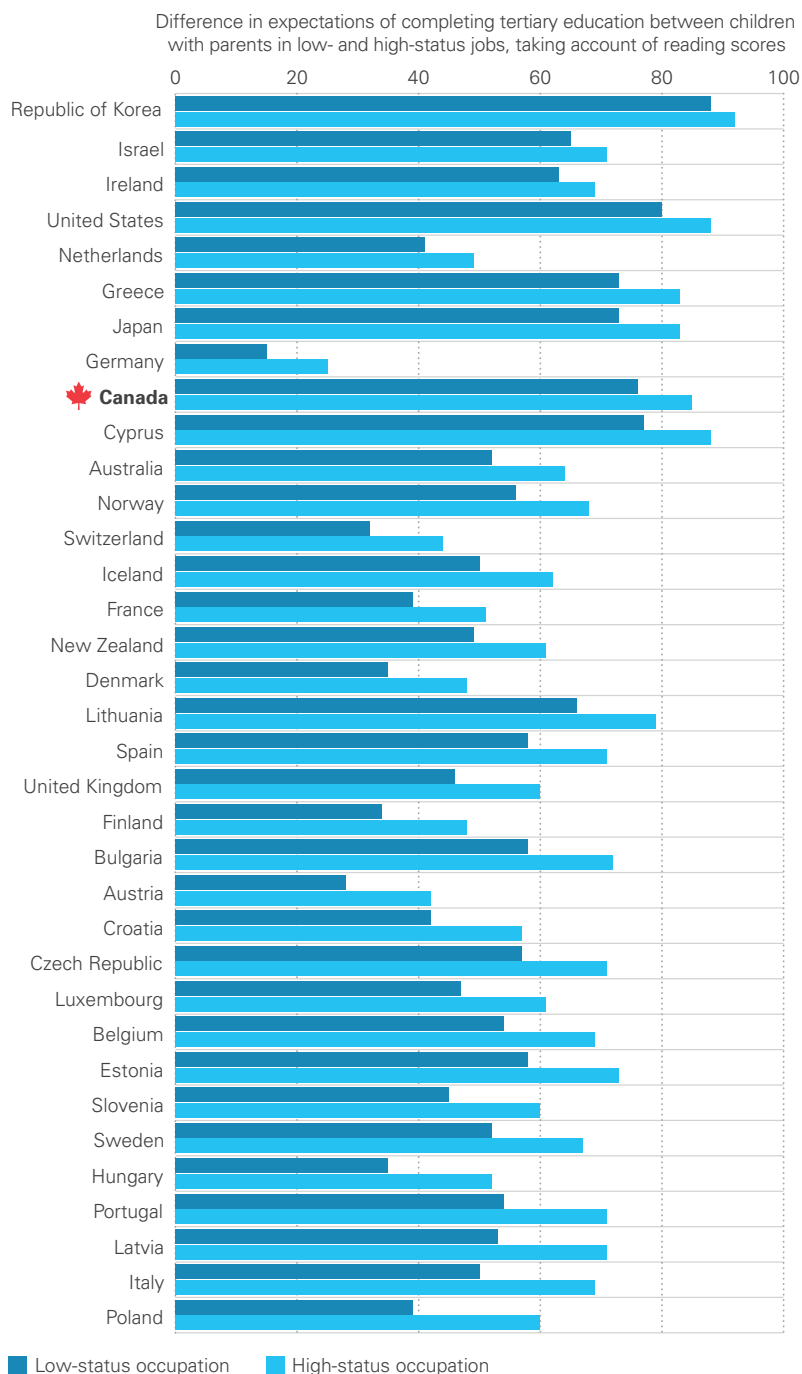
Family circumstances matter to children's expectations for further education

In Canada, family wealth has less influence than in other rich countries, but it matters. Beyond the cost of going to college or university, differences in young people's expectations to participate are rooted in cultural and social differences starting very early in life. These include whether a parent went to post-secondary school and family wealth. These tend to have an effect even though there are programs like student loans to offset costs.

- Canada ranks 9th among 36 countries in the size of the future expectations gap related to family wealth.
- In Canada, **85%** of children from wealthy families expect to continue their education compared to **76%** of the less affluent.
- In 2016, **60%** of post-secondary students in Canada came from the wealthier **40%** of families.
- Children of higher earning parents tend to be doing better at school. However, children of

Figure 8: In some countries there is little difference in children's expectations of further education despite differences in wealth (when their reading scores are similar)

Expectation gap between children with low-earning parents and those with high-earning parents with the same reading scores (2015)



low-earning parents are less likely to say that they expect to complete further education even if they score as highly as their peers with high-earning parents.

- But in Canada, even children with considerably lower reading scores, in families with less wealth, have higher expectations of participating in tertiary education than in most countries.
- Canada ranks 4th based on how much reading score differences affect expectations (see figure 7). This is another sign that wealth has less influence on expectations in Canada than in many peer countries.

Girls and boys have different expectations

In addition to different expectations for further education based on family background, expectations are different for boys and girls.

- In 30 of 36 countries, girls are much more likely than boys to expect to go to college or university.
- In Canada, **69%** of males and **95%** of females attend post-secondary education.^{vii}



U-REPORT: Post-Secondary Expectations

We asked young people what influenced their decisions to go to college or university, and what the barriers were. Here's what they told us:



Almost half of young people (**45%**) say that the value they see in further education influences their decisions about going to college or university. Family expectations are a major influence as well – the primary influence for about one in five (**21%**). The way further education is delivered – its location and affordability – is the major influence for almost one in five (**22%**).

The biggest barrier that young people (**41%**) say might stop them from going to college or university is the cost. For many others (**26%**), uncertainty about the kind of program they want to take is another big consideration. **16%** of young people say they can't go because of their grades.

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WHEN CANADA HAS BIG DREAMS, BETTER IS POSSIBLE

This report tells us that if Canada can do well in education, we should be able to do well in other areas of child and youth well-being too.

This UNICEF Report Card shows us that when Canadians have dreams for their children, great things happen. Canadians support a strong public education system and deliver it comparatively very well. If we can create fairness as well as high achievement in education for many, we should also be able to do better and close gaps in other aspects of children's lives that are critical to their rights and well-being.

Every child has the right to education that not only equips them for the future but helps realize their rights to mental and physical health, freedom from violence, participation and dignity. Every child should be able to dream and to achieve their dreams. There are many things that Canada's education system does well to help fulfil these rights. Better is possible, but will take actions inside and outside of Canada's schools to work against growing threats and to seize big opportunities. How can we produce fairer learning opportunities while advancing well-being for every young person?



GROWING THREATS



We don't have a crystal ball to predict the future, but there are signals of possible threats to fairness in education that we can lean against now. These include:

1. Income inequality

Income inequality is about more than poverty. It is about differences in opportunity between those who have the most and those who have the least. With wider income inequality, the children of the wealthy are more likely to do better in school and stay wealthy, the children of the poor are more likely to stay poor, and the children in the middle are equally as likely to fall down or rise up the income ladder. Getting a good education creates less opportunity for advancement in countries where there is wide income inequality and people are more likely to be stuck at the bottom.

2. School stratification (grouping young people into schools based on their family wealth, ability or other differences)

As income inequality has grown in Canada, some neighbourhoods have become much richer and some much poorer. As the Report Card shows, grouping students in different schools because of wealth and other differences contributes to lower overall achievement and greater educational inequality.

If income inequality keeps growing, private fundraising for schools might keep growing. This would likely widen the achievement gaps between children and between schools. Fundraising is common in Canadian schools. In Ontario in 2018, **99%** of elementary and **87%** of secondary schools raised money for a range of things^{viii} like early learning, technology, arts and extra-curricular activities. More private fundraising for schools might create even more learning enrichment opportunities in schools where wealthier children are, in richer neighbourhoods. A study by People for Education found that in Ontario, elementary schools with lower rates of family poverty raise twice the amount of private fundraising than schools with higher rates of poverty^{ix}. So poorer children tend to start school with a gap in skills, their schools are less able to provide enrichment to help close the gap, and their families may not be able to provide these opportunities outside of school.

What about private schools? Almost one in 10 schools in Canada is private. Not all of them charge tuition and other fees, but independent schools can do so following provincial rules. If there is more demand for schools where wealthier kids can go, it might widen educational inequality.

Many Canadian youth go to post-secondary school (college or university). Post-secondary costs are rising in our competitive job market. Along with tuition costs, higher admission grades are keeping many students out of prestigious programs. These trends might contribute to greater educational and income inequality.

If I were Premier,

Let me get straight to the point.

We live in a time where university acceptances are competitive beyond belief. Getting a 90% overall average over the course of high school may mean a mere 20% chance that a student may get into top programs of their choice at Canadian universities.

I have noticed that this has created an ultra-competitive environment, where students may spend countless hours studying and stressing just to “boost” their average a couple of percentage points. This has contributed to an immense epidemic of mental health issues. The repercussions have been horrific. I have seen many people, including my close friends, break down and lose hours of sleep, night after night. I have even seen some develop anxiety and even suicidal thoughts due to the stress that this has caused them. Too many students have been affected by this for it to be considered a small issue.

To address this issue, I co-founded an organization. In our first 6 months, we received funding and have hosted workshops where we connected students with appropriate strategies to deal with school stress and with speakers and mental health professionals in our community. I strongly believe that if passionate, motivated people come together, we can solve the student mental wellness crisis.

Yash, age 17, Ontario

UNICEF Canada invites young people to write “If I were Premier” letters to share their experiences and solutions as part of the One Youth campaign.

3. Tutoring (shadow education)

“Shadow education” is privately paid extra education such as tutoring. The number of students in Canada who have tutoring has been growing. For many parents it is seen as a more affordable option than private school to give their kids an advantage. Many students of private tutoring in Canada are already achieving well, and there isn’t a lot of evidence that tutoring improves education results, so it may not be having an impact on educational inequality. More time spent learning does not always lead to better results. But private education like tutoring might give more advantages to children of wealthy families. As well, with about one in five of Canada’s children enrolled in tutoring, there may be time lost for other things that could foster learning and development^x.



BIG OPPORTUNITIES!



There are many actions underway inside and outside schools to promote equality and create well-rounded opportunities and well-being among children and youth. More is better!

1. Reduce income inequality and child poverty

- More than one million children in Canada live in poverty, and the rate of child poverty is highest among 0-5 year-olds, in the most formative years.
- All levels of government should set a target to reduce child poverty by at least **50%** by 2020, and **60%** by 2030, through an increase in family income like the Canada Child Benefit.
- A National Housing Strategy including Indigenous communities should help equalize children’s learning and development by ensuring safe and secure housing. By 2030, no child in Canada should ever be homeless.

2. Guarantee high-quality early childhood education and care to all children

- When children in some families benefit from preschool that others can’t afford, inequality grows. Increasing opportunities to go to early child education in Canada would also help lift families with young children out of poverty.
- Every province and territory should offer full-day kindergarten to all children ages 4 and 5.
- Every child below age 5 should be able to go to high quality childcare/early learning programs.
- Every child in Canada should get to go, including those with disabilities and special needs, no matter their parents’ employment, migration status or income.
- Indigenous children should have services that respect their cultures.
- By failing to invest in early child education and development, countries end up spending a lot more on education and health than they would otherwise need to.

3. Close the gaps between children

From early child learning to further education, there are some groups of children more likely to be left behind.

Indigenous Children

Indigenous children are the fastest-growing child population.

The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on Canada to close education gaps for Indigenous children with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Every school in Canada should be a place where all children are able to develop respect for Indigenous cultures and peoples.

Gender

To help close gender gaps in education, some experts suggest the need for a better understanding of how girls and boys do with different types of curriculum, teaching and assessment.

Children of diverse genders and gender expressions are not always fully included in schools due to bullying and discrimination.

Racialized Children

Some racialized groups of children are more likely to be suspended or expelled for infractions.

Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities often experience exclusion, especially when specialized learning supports are unequally available in schools.

Some children experience many types of discrimination or disadvantage in their lives, and need connected support between schools and communities including mentoring, food security and housing.

Canada's education systems are working to identify and close gaps in many ways. More targeted funding to schools with wide within-school gaps, and to schools with lower average scores, would help increase equity. Policies like ability grouping could be considered from an equity perspective.

U-REPORT: Indigenous Education



CANADA

We asked young people about their knowledge of Indigenous history and culture, and their desire to learn more. Here's what they told us:

About a third of young people (34%) say they know quite a bit or a lot about Indigenous history and culture. More young people (66%) say they know a little or nothing.

An overwhelming 91% of young people say they are interested in learning more about Indigenous history and culture.

Young people are learning about Indigenous history and culture in a range of ways. Many young people (59%) learn at school. The rest are learning from parents, friends, on the Internet and in other ways.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report.

School systems that have specific goals to create equality are making progress.

4. Expand learning for the future

Beyond reading, science and math, children and youth also want to learn life skills like how to manage their health, financial literacy and about their human rights. Student success in both school and life consists of much more than literacy and numeracy (e.g. UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; Winthrop & McGivney, 2016).

But it is much easier to educate children for the

past than for their future. According to the OECD, the biggest threat to schooling today is the loss of purpose and relevance^{xi}. Schools that help develop children's social and emotional skills, and teach and respect children's human rights, enable children not only to learn the "basics" but to develop a sense of control over their life, become more resilient in the face of adversity and aim higher in their aspirations for the future (e.g. Christensen & Lane, 2016; OECD, 2016; People for Education, 2017).

5. Make learning safer and healthier

We focus on certain markers of education fairness in this Report Card like reading achievement, but we call for a holistic and balanced approach to children's learning and broader well-being at school:

Food Security: enough healthy, affordable food

- Canada's high rate of food insecurity, ranked 24 among rich countries, is linked to a high rate of child poverty, also ranked 24^{xii}.
- About one in six Canadian children (two in three Inuit children) doesn't have enough healthy food. Reducing poverty among children is key to reducing food insecurity.
- It's a widespread problem: many children come to school without breakfast and have a lot of unhealthy food and drink. One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast^{xiii}.
- A universal healthy school food program in Canada would give every child at least one healthy meal or snack every day, with many benefits to learning, physical and mental health and relationships at school.
- When children go to school hungry they are more likely to repeat a grade and less likely to graduate high school.
- When some schools provide school meals and others don't, this contributes to inequality in education.

U-REPORT: School Meal Programs



CANADA

We asked young people for their thoughts on school meal programs.

Here's what they told us:

Most young people (**64%**) say their school doesn't have a meal program.

A large number of young people (**70%**) say they think students in their schools would benefit from a school meal program.

Most young people (**69%**) would use a school meal program if their school had one.

Of the young people who say they wouldn't use a school meal program, most (**65%**) say it's because they don't need one. About a third (**29%**) say they wouldn't use it because others need it more. **6%** say they worry about what others would think – for these few there may be a stigma attached to school meal programs.

Visit www.ureportcanada.ca for more information and to sign up for U-Report.

Bullying

Like food insecurity, bullying is more common in societies with wider income inequality.

- Children who are food-insecure are more likely to be bullied. Both affect learning.
- In both primary and secondary school, close to **50%** of Canada's children report being bullied weekly or monthly.
- Canada ranks 24th out of 30 countries for exposure to bullying at age 15 (see figure 9), because bullying affects more children than the rich country average of **41%**.

- In Canada, children who are bullied weekly in primary school score **34%** lower in math than those not bullied so often. They also score lower in reading in Grade 4.
- Bullying affects all students, not just the targets. Most schools with higher rates of bullying have lower reading scores.
- Most bullying is by school mates, so children who are often bullied are more likely to report that they feel like outsiders at school, affecting their well-being as well as their grades.
- Students' sense of belonging at school in Canada is weaker than the rich country average, and getting worse over time.
- Almost a quarter of students (**23%**) report feeling like an outsider at school in contrast to the average of **17%**, and it is more prevalent among disadvantaged students.

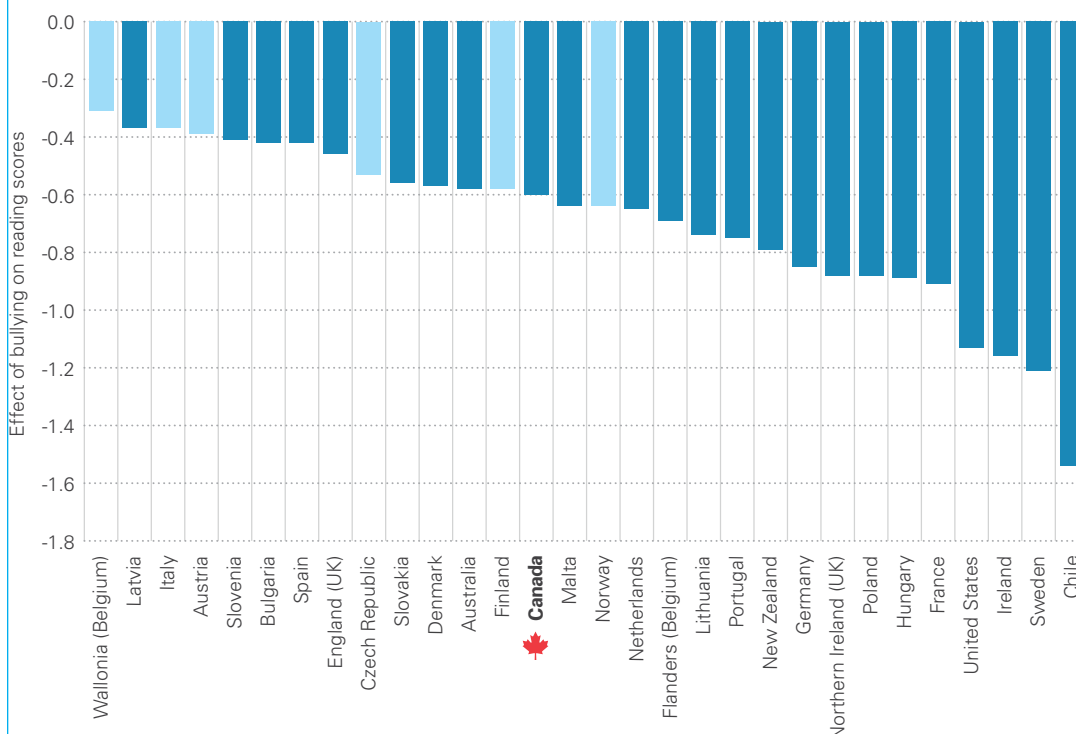
Mental Health and Anxiety

School climate surveys, studies like the Ontario Student Mental Health and Well-being Survey (OSDUHS)¹⁰ and international surveys tell us that increasing pressure to compete and achieve at school may partly explain why children's mental health has been declining^{xiv} and why there is little difference in life satisfaction reported by top-achieving and low-achieving students^{xv}.

- Anxiety about schoolwork is one of the sources of stress most often reported by children.
- In Canada, anxiety is more common in schools where students study more than 50 hours a week than in schools where they study 35-40 hours a week.
- Anxiety may be higher because students believe they need top grades for better career prospects and worry more about their future.

Schools can promote well-being by listening to student perspectives and considering the impacts of school policies and other decisions on children's rights and well-being.

Figure 9: How much does school-level bullying affect reading scores (2015)?



10 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2017, Ontario Student Mental Health and Well-being Survey. CAMH, Toronto.

JOIN UNICEF CANADA'S ONE YOUTH AND HELP US MAKE CANADA THE #1 PLACE IN THE WORLD TO GROW UP.

It is only by better understanding the state of our children and youth that Canada can identify the challenges, design solutions and direct smart investments to close the gaps and make children's lives better. It's up to all of us to sustain our commitment to Canada's great equalizer, our public education systems, and ensure they work for every child.

One Youth is a campaign to elevate the rights and well-being of Canada's children and youth.
Please join us.



How to get involved with One Youth

Here are some ways to get involved with the exciting work we are doing to help us improve child and youth well-being in Canada:

If you are 13-24 years old, **join U-Report Canada** and speak out on issues that matter to you and inform decisions that affect you: www.ureportcanada.ca

Write a blog on your school experience or something you are passionate about for our Kids of Canada series: www.unicef.ca/en/blog/kids-canada-unicef-canada-wants-hear-you

Sign up for our **One Youth Newsletter** to learn more about what we're up to at: www.oneyouthcanada.ca



SOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Sources

The full list of sources is available in UNICEF Report Card 15. The following supplemental sources are cited in this Canadian Companion:

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- v People for Education, 2015, Applied or Academic: High impact decisions for Ontario students. People for Education, Toronto.
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- viii People for Education. 2018. Fundraising and fees in Ontario's schools. People for Education, Toronto.
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- xi See <http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.com/2018/05/>
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- xiii The Coalition for Healthy School Food, 2018, For a Universal Healthy School Food Program.
- xiv UNICEF Canada. 2016. UNICEF Report Card 13: Canadian Companion. Fairness for Children. UNICEF Canada, Toronto.
- xv OCED. 2017. PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-being. OCED, Paris.

FIGURES

Figure 1

Source: UNICEF Report Card 14 (2017).

Figure 2

Note: Most recent data are for 2013 for Iceland and Japan, and 2014 for Slovenia, Portugal, Greece, Poland, Mexico, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Source: SDG Indicators Global Database, Indicator 4.2.2 (UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT Surveys of Formal Education), except Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Slovakia (age 5 enrolment in centre-based services, EU-SILC 2015) and Canada (Indicator 4.2.2, 2015-16, Government of Canada Sustainable Development Goal Data Hub, <https://www144.statcan.gc.ca/sdg-odd/goal-objectif04-eng.htm>).

Figure 3

Note: Wallonia (Belgium) denotes the French-speaking Community / Federation Wallonia-Brussels, while Flanders (Belgium) refers to the Flemish speaking region of Flanders.

The performance gap is measured as the absolute difference between the 90th and 10th percentiles of the reading score.

The reading achievement scale has a mean of 500, corresponding to mean reading achievement in 2001, and a standard deviation of 100.

Source: PIRLS 2016.

Figure 4

Note: The performance gap is measured as the absolute difference between the 90th and 10th percentiles of the reading score.

The reading achievement scale has a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100 based on a reference group of countries.

Chile, Mexico and Turkey are not included in the rankings. This is due to low coverage rates (below 80 per cent) in PISA (see OECD, 2016b, Table A2.1, Coverage Index 3), which means that their results may not be representative.

Source: PISA 2015.

Figure 5

Note: The chart shows percentages for each group of children by migration, in countries where at least 5 per cent of children were not born in the country. Countries are ranked on absolute gaps between non-immigrant and first-generation migrants.

Source: PISA 2015.

Figure 6

Note: The table shows the extent to which girls did better than boys in reading tests for the countries that took part in both PIRLS 2016 and PISA 2015. The two surveys test different reading skills so are not directly comparable, but it appears that the gap tends to widen as children get older. The table shows the percentage by which girls score higher than boys in reading in each country and stage, calculated as $100 \times (\text{Girls' mean} - \text{Boys' mean}) / \text{Boys' mean}$. The gap is expressed as a percentage based on the difference between the two scores divided by the boys' score. For example, if the mean score for girls was 550 and the mean score for boys was 500 then girls would be doing 10-per-cent better than boys. All differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) except in Portugal at Grade 4. The shading shows the countries in the lowest (light blue), middle (medium blue) and highest (dark blue) third of the rankings among the countries that took part in both surveys. The gender gaps for other countries participating in PISA were: Japan (2.6 per cent); Mexico (3.8 per cent); Romania (4.1 per cent); Luxembourg (4.5 per cent); Switzerland (5.3 per cent); Croatia (5.6 per cent); Turkey (6.7 per cent); Estonia (5.5 per cent); Greece (8.3 per cent); Rep. of Korea (8.1 per cent); Iceland (9.0 per cent); Cyprus (12.4 per cent).

In Canada, PIRLS does not cover the entire country: SK, MB and PEI do not participate in PIRLS.

Source: PIRLS 2016 and PISA 2015.

Figure 7

Note: The bars show the reading score gap in expectations of completing tertiary education between children of low- and high-earning parents in each country.

Source: PISA 2015.

Figure 8

Note: The bars show the expectations of completing tertiary education for children of low- and high-earning parents in each country, from a regression model controlling for reading scores. Countries are ranked in ascending order of the size of the difference between the two groups.

Source: PISA 2015.

Figure 9

Note: The bars represent the statistical effect of a 1 percentage point lower school-level share of students reporting being bullied weekly on reading achievement, controlling for the child's gender, the language of testing and the language the child speaks at home, the location of the school, whether the child comes to school hungry or tired, or has breakfast on school days, the child's age, and principal-reported school composition by student socio-economic status.

Countries with statistically significant differences between occupational groups (at $p < 0.05$) are noted with more intense shading.

Source: PIRLS 2016.

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