

Every three years the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) releases results of tests conducted on 15-year-olds in more than 30 countries and city-states—what the OECD calls “economies”. Each test, under the banner of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), assesses performance on reading, math, and science.

The next round of PISA scores will be released on December 3, 2019.



GRIPPED BY “PISA PANIC”?

Stay calm, and consider this:

- ▶ **The OECD is an economic, not an educational organization.** It views education as primarily serving human capital development and economic growth.
- ▶ **The tests are written for profit.** PISA tests are created by private companies that win lucrative contracts from the OECD.
- ▶ **PISA is not designed to test students on local curriculum.** It is designed to rank countries and city-states around the world as a predictor of their students’ ability to participate in the global economy.
- ▶ **PISA ignores cultural context.** The test harmonizes narrow competencies on a global scale, assuming these create the foundation for success wherever they are applied.
- ▶ **The data serves a narrow purpose.** PISA is structured to provide a large-scale, context-free snapshot, not individual student, school-level, or system-wide feedback.
- ▶ **Translation is tricky.** It’s extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create a perfect translation of the test in the dozens of languages required.
- ▶ **The world moves faster than PISA.** Given the speed with which social, political, and cultural context evolves, any test would be hard-pressed to predict students’ capacity to excel years later.
- ▶ **PISA is political.** Fueled by world-wide media coverage, “poor” results are often used to justify large-scale educational change. In some jurisdictions, this has led to increased standardization and privatization of education. The media spotlight and resulting pressure can lead to misdiagnosing a problem—and the creation of ineffective, short-sighted, and costly responses.
- ▶ **PISA = big business.** Edu-businesses flourish in the marketplace created by PISA panic, designing and selling standardized assessment solutions that advance the OECD’s agenda.



**The
Manitoba
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In the last round of PISA testing—conducted in 2015—Canadian students ranked 7th in the world, ahead of those in the United States, Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, Switzerland, France and Denmark, to name a few. Manitoba students ranked in the top third globally, above their cohort in the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Iceland, Israel, and a host of other jurisdictions.

Regardless of ranking, teacher associations around the world—including The Manitoba Teachers’ Society—reject large-scale standardized global testing as a means of assessing local public education. We agree that ongoing assessment of student performance is essential, but best conducted in a classroom using curriculum-based tools rooted in academic, cultural, and environmental context.