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On the most recent international tests, students in a number of countries consistently outperformed their U.S. peers across the board in reading, math, and science, according to a new federal study released Tuesday.

The study, *U.S. Performance Across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to The Condition of Education 2009*, looks closely at information gathered from the most recent international assessments taken by nearly a million students from 85 countries worldwide. It was produced by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the Institute of Education Sciences.

“This report pulls together the evidence on international comparisons from all of the assessments the U.S. participates in,” said Stuart Kerachsky, NCES acting commissioner. “It shows that the performance of U.S. students neither leads nor trails the world in reading, mathematics, or science for any of the ages or grades measured.”

While the mathematics scores of U.S. students have improved since 1995, there have been no gains in science or reading.

The supplement analyzes performance trends from three internationally benchmarked exams -- the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Results from these international tests already have been released separately. However, this special analysis brings the results altogether to reveal how the United States compares with other countries across all three core subjects and at the elementary, middle and high school level in terms of students' average scores and the percentage of students reaching internationally benchmarked performance levels. It also examines trends in U.S. student performance and the range of performance for the highest- and lowest-scoring students in each country. Although the tests differ somewhat by content, grades tested and countries participating, several trends emerge.

Four countries, for example, stand out for outperforming the U.S. on all subjects: Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Finland. However, not every country participates in all three assessments or at every grade level.

Other findings include:

**READING:**

- U.S. student performance has not changed since the first administrations of PIRLS in 2001 and PISA in 2000.
- The average scores of U.S. students are the same or higher than their peers in roughly three-quarters of the other countries that have participated in PIRLS and PISA assessments.
- The number of countries that outperformed the United States on PIRLS increased from three in 2001 to seven in 2006 among the 28 countries that participated in both tests.

**MATHEMATICS:**

- Results from the 2007 TIMSS assessment show that U.S. students have improved at both grades 4 and 8 since the first administration of TIMSS in 1995.
- The most recent PISA results suggests that U.S. 15-year-olds are not as successful in applying mathematics knowledge and skills to real-world tasks as their peers in many other developed nations. The average score placed U.S. 15-year-olds in the bottom quarter of participating developed nations, a position unchanged from 2003.
- Only 1 percent of U.S. 15-year-olds performed at the highest level of proficiency on PISA, which means they have mastered mathematical operations such as applying fractions, algebraic equations, and basic trigonometry; are capable of advanced mathematical reasoning; and can conceptualize and model complex problems.

**SCIENCE:**

- Results from TIMSS 2007 assessment show that U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> graders have fallen behind their peers in several countries, even though their average scores in science have not declined since the first administration of TIMSS in 1995.
- Among the other 15 countries that participated in the 1995 and 2007 TIMSS at grade 4, the average science score increased in seven countries and decreased in five countries; at grade 8, the average science score increased in five countries and decreased in three countries among the other 18 countries that participated in both 1995 and 2007.
- PISA 2006 results show that U.S. 15-year-olds do not, on average, apply scientific knowledge and skills to real-world tasks as well as their peers in the majority of other developed countries. The U.S. average science literacy score of 489 was lower than the average of 500 for the developed countries, and placed U.S. students in the bottom third of participating nations.

The National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations. For more information, please visit the website [nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov).