

Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection

Country note United States

The United States did not distribute the “ICT familiarity questionnaire” as part of PISA 2012. Because of missing data, some figures in the report do not include the United States.

- The socio-economic divide in Internet access in the United States has not yet closed. In 2012, about **one in five (20.2%) disadvantaged students** – those among the bottom 25% in socio-economic status – **did not yet have a link to the Internet at home**. In the same year, 97% of the remaining students (those among the more advantaged 75% in socio-economic status) had access to the Internet at home.
- Fifteen-year-olds in the United States **perform above the OECD average in the PISA tests of digital reading** (511 points on the PISA digital reading scale). They are also better than average in evaluating which links can lead them to relevant pages as they read on line. When looking for information on the web, only 11% of students navigate in an unfocused way, if at all – compared to 15% of students, on average, across OECD countries.
- In 2012, schools in the United States serving 15-year-olds had **about five school computers available for every nine students**. The students-per-computer ratio of 1.8-to-1 is one of the lowest among the 34 OECD countries.

Key international findings

Over the past 10 years, there has been no appreciable improvement in student achievement in reading, mathematics or science, on average, in countries that have invested heavily in information and communication technologies for education. In 2012, in the vast majority of countries, students who used computers moderately at school had somewhat better learning outcomes than students who used computers rarely; but students who used computers very frequently at school did a lot worse, even after accounting for the students’ socio-economic status.

The top-performing country in the PISA 2012 assessment of digital reading was Singapore, followed by Korea, Hong Kong-China, Japan, Canada and Shanghai-China. Students in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Korea, Singapore and the United States showed the most advanced web-browsing skills. More often than students elsewhere, they carefully selected links to follow before clicking on them, and followed relevant links for as long as was needed to answer the question. To use and understand online sources of information, students need such web-browsing skills in addition to the reading skills required for printed texts.

In most countries, differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students in access to computers and the Internet at home shrank between 2009 and 2012. In all but five OECD countries with available data, in 2012 disadvantaged students – those from the bottom 25% in socio-economic status – typically spent at least as much time on line, outside of school, as advantaged students did. But traditional socio-economic differences persist when looking at how students use their time on line, and they continue to have a strong impact on performance in reading. Indeed in all countries, advantaged students are significantly more likely to use their time on line to read news or obtain practical information. To benefit from online information about education, health or financial services and improve one’s personal situation, having sufficient basic skills in reading is perhaps more important than easy access to the Internet.

Students’ exposure to computers at school varies significantly across countries and schools. While the availability of devices and of an Internet connection at school explains much of this variation, teachers’ readiness to integrate technology into instruction also depends on other factors, such as whether the devices can be accessed in the classroom or only in separate rooms, whether the school has a digital skills curriculum, and whether teachers in the

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school have learned how to use these devices to enhance student learning. Among all teachers, those who are more inclined to use and better prepared for practices such as group work, individualised learning and project work are more likely to use digital resources.

To learn more...

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