



NEWS RELEASE

International math test scores decline nationwide over recent 15-year period

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Students in every province recorded declining results in international math tests from 2003 to 2018, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan, Canadian public policy think-tank.

“Mathematics holds a position of strategic importance in the school curriculum, especially in our increasingly digital world, which makes these signs of declining math performance by Canadian students all the more worrisome,” said Derek Allison, professor Emeritus at the University of Western Ontario, a Fraser Institute senior fellow and co-author of *Math Performance in Canada*.

Conducted every three years, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the most extensive and widely accepted measure of academic proficiency among lower secondary school students around the world.

Analysing PISA data over the most recent 15-year period, the study finds that Canada overall fell from fifth highest score among the 37 participant countries in 2003 to 12th place among the 78 participating jurisdictions in the most recent 2018 assessment.

Crucially, PISA scores declined in every province over that period.

Declines were steepest in Manitoba with a decrease of 8.7 per cent, followed by Alberta (6.9 per cent), and British Columbia (6.3 per cent), and least severe in Prince Edward Island (2.6 per cent) and Ontario (3.2 per cent), with only a small non-statistically significant drop in Quebec’s scores 0.7 per cent).

The study also reviews trends in the provinces’ own measures of math performance against their own curriculum standards, as opposed to broader assessments used to measure performance internationally.

And even in the province’s own assessments, math scores have declined.

“By almost every measure, math scores are declining across the country,” said Vincent Geloso, a senior fellow at the Fraser Institute and co-author of the study.

“Policymakers and educators need to understand the severity of these declining math results, and should seriously consider ways to reverse the trend.”

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