



# Are students happy? PISA 2015 Results: Students' Well-Being

PISA

PISA In Focus #71



## What the data tell us

### Performance at school and life satisfaction

- On average across OECD countries, 15-year-old students are satisfied with the life they are living: they report a level of 7.3 on a scale of life satisfaction that ranges from 0 to 10. But around 12% of students, on average, are not satisfied with their life: they report 4 or less on the scale.
- Girls and disadvantaged students were less likely than boys and advantaged students to report high levels of life satisfaction.
- Top-performing students are only slightly more satisfied with their life than students who perform at an average level. There is no clear relationship between study time and life satisfaction.
- Around 64% of girls and 47% of boys reported that they feel very anxious even if they are well prepared for a test. Schoolwork-related anxiety is negatively related to performance at school and to students' satisfaction with their life.
- Girls were more likely than boys to report that they want top grades at school and that they want to be able to select among the best opportunities when they graduate. But boys were more likely than girls to describe themselves as ambitious.
- On average across OECD countries, 44% of 15-year-old students expect that they will complete university. In Colombia, Korea, Qatar and the United States, more than three out of four students expect so. On average, disadvantaged students were 40 percentage points (or 2.5 times) less likely to expect to complete a university degree than advantaged students.

### Students' social life at school

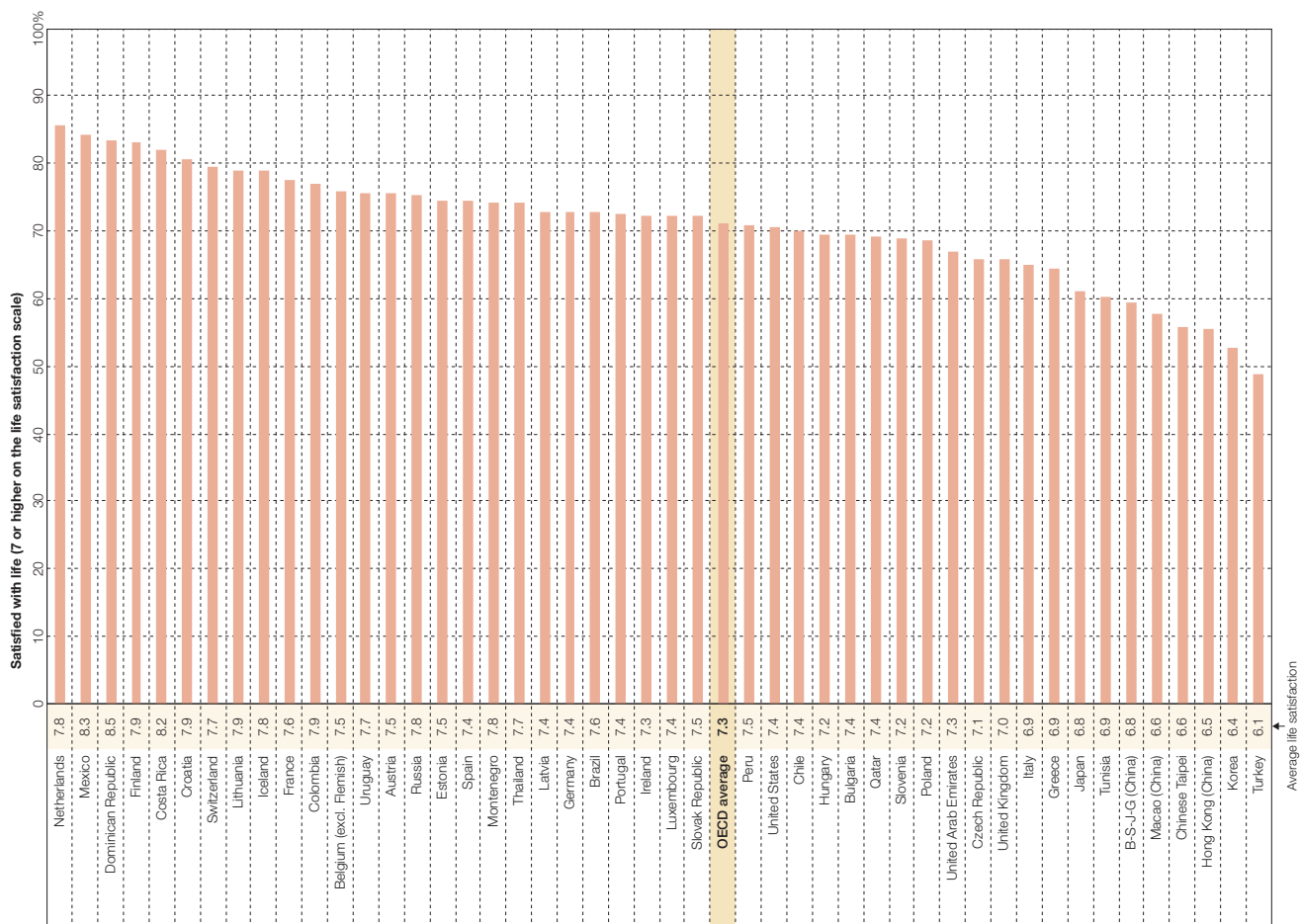
- The majority of students in 67 countries and economies feel that they belong to the school community. However, in many countries, disadvantaged students and first-generation immigrant students were less likely to report feeling a sense of belonging at school than other students.
- On average across OECD countries, and in many partner countries and economies, students' sense of belonging at school weakened between 2003 and 2015.
- One in five students reported that they experience some form of unfair treatment by their teachers (they are harshly disciplined, or feel offended or ridiculed in front of others) at least a few times in a given month.
- Some 4% of students across OECD countries (the equivalent of around one student per class) reported that they are hit or pushed around by other students at least a few times per month. Another 8% of students reported that they are hit or pushed a few times per year. Around 11% of students reported that other students make fun of them, and 8% reported that they are the object of nasty rumours at least a few times per month.
- Girls are less likely than boys to become victims of physical aggression, but are more likely to be the object of nasty rumours.
- There is less incidence of bullying in schools where students reported that there is a better disciplinary climate in the classroom and where students perceive that their teachers behave fairly.
- On average across OECD countries, students attending schools where bullying is frequent, by international standards, score 47 points lower in science than students in schools where bullying occurs less frequently. This difference is equal to 25 score points after accounting for the socio-economic profile of the school.
- Students who are frequently bullied were more likely to report that their parents do not help them with difficulties at school than students who are not frequently bullied.

### Parents and the home environment

- On average across 18 countries and economies, 82% of parents reported that they eat the main meal with their child around a table, 70% reported that they spend time just talking with their child, and 52% reported that they discuss how well their child is doing at school every day or almost every day. Students whose parents engage in these activities at least once a week score higher in the PISA science test and were more likely to report that they are very satisfied with their life.
- Parents cited the inability to get time off from work (cited by 36% of parents), the inconvenience of school meeting times (cited by 33% of parents) and the lack of knowledge about how to participate in school activities (cited by 17% of parents) as among the most common barriers to their participation in school activities.
- A student's satisfaction with life is associated with his or her relative status at school, as measured by the difference between his or her wealth and the wealth of the other students in the school.
- Children of blue-collar workers hold higher education and career expectations when they attend schools with a large proportion of children of white-collar workers.

## Life satisfaction among 15-year-old students

Percentage of students who reported a level of life satisfaction of 7 or higher on a scale from 0 to 10



Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who reported being satisfied with their life (they reported a level of satisfaction with their life of 7 or higher on a scale from 0 to 10).

Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.3.1.

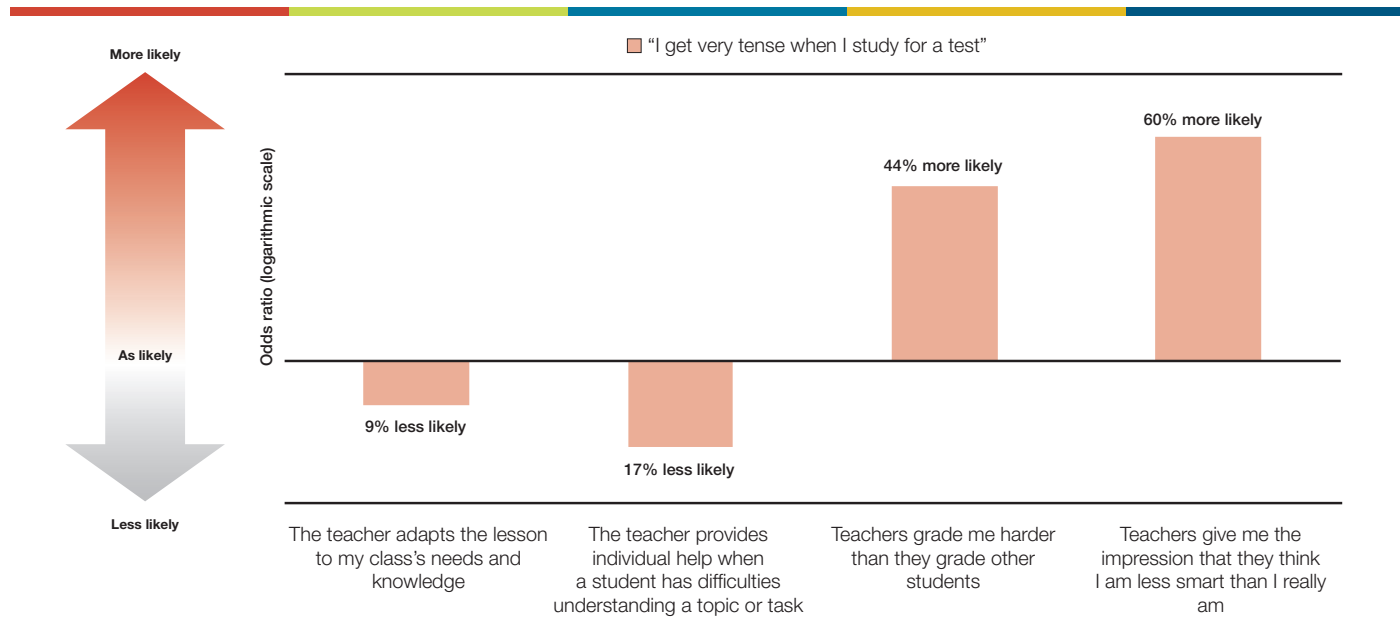
## Students' use of their time outside of school

- About 6.6% of students across OECD countries do not engage in any kind of moderate or vigorous physical activity outside of school, and the share of physically inactive students is 1.8 percentage points higher among girls than among boys. Physically active students are less likely than those who do not participate in any kind of physical activity outside of school to skip school, feel like an outsider at school, feel very anxious about schoolwork, or be frequently bullied.
- Students who do more physical education at school are also more likely to be physically active outside of school.
- Having dinner regularly is positively associated with adolescents' satisfaction with life, particularly among girls.
- On average across OECD countries, around 23% of students reported that they work for pay and 73% reported that they work in the house before or after school. More boys than girls work for pay, and fewer boys than girls do unpaid household chores.
- Students who work for pay were more likely than those who do not work for pay to report feeling like an outsider at school, having low expectations for further education, arriving late for school, and skipping school.
- On average across OECD countries, students spend more than two hours on line during a typical weekday after school, and more than three hours on line during a typical weekend day. Between 2012 and 2015, the time spent on line outside of school increased by 40 minutes per day on both weekdays and weekends.
- Students who spend more than six hours on line per weekday outside of school were more likely than students who spend fewer hours on line to report that they are not satisfied with their life or that they feel lonely at school; they are also less proficient in PISA subjects.



## Teachers' practices and students' schoolwork-related anxiety

Likelihood that students get very tense when they study for a test associated with teachers' practices



Notes: A logarithmic transformation of the odds ratio is plotted to make the values below one and above one comparable in the graph. The interpretation of the odds ratio (in terms of percentage change in the likelihood of the outcome) is indicated above or below each bar.

The values account for students' differences in the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), and performance in science.

All values are statistically significant.

Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.4.11.

## Schools can boost students' motivation to achieve and build their confidence

Schools are not only places where students acquire academic skills; they are also social environments where children can develop the social and emotional competencies that they need to thrive. Yet despite the global interest in students' well-being, there is no consensus on which policies or curriculum changes are needed to improve adolescents' quality of life at school.

The data from PISA 2015 show that students differ greatly, both between and within countries, in how satisfied they are with their life, in their motivation to achieve, in how anxious they feel about their schoolwork, in their participation in physical activities, in their expectations for the future, in their experiences of being bullied by their peers, and in their perceptions of being treated unfairly by their teachers. Many of these differences are related to students' feelings about the disciplinary climate in the classroom and about the support their teachers give them.

PISA 2015 data show that schoolwork-related anxiety is common among adolescents. Often, this anxiety is students' reaction to, and interpretation of, the mistakes they make – or are afraid to make. Students whose motivation to do well at school mostly originates from fear of disappointing others or the desire to do better than their peers are more likely to report anxiety at school. It is important that schools identify those students who suffer from severe anxiety and teach these students methods to learn from mistakes and manage their stress.

Teachers can also help students set learning goals at an appropriate level of difficulty and reward the progress that students make towards these goals in their feedback and assessment practices.

## Schools can function as caring communities only if they have engaged teachers

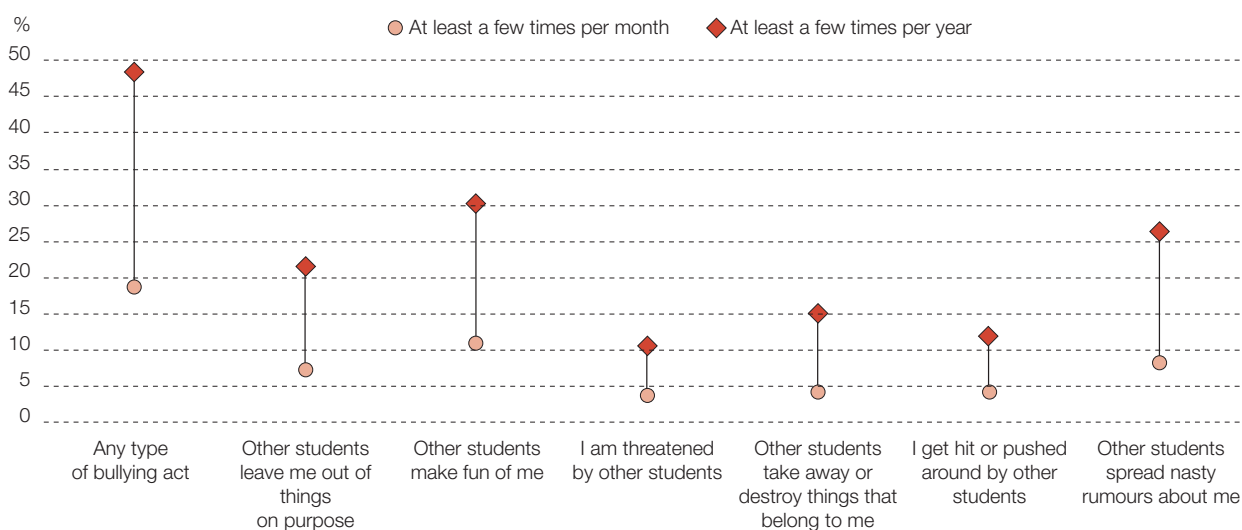
Teachers who master classroom and relationship management methods have the means to establish rewarding and supportive connections with their students, even in the most difficult contexts.

Such engagement from teachers is particularly crucial in combatting bullying at school. PISA 2015 data show that a large proportion of students reported being victims of bullying. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to preventing bullying. PISA data show that there is less reported bullying in schools where students have positive relationships with their teachers. Analysis

of successful anti-bullying programmes around the world suggests that parents need to be involved in school planning and responses to bullying. Schools also need to collaborate with other institutions and services to put in place comprehensive prevention and response plans.

## Students' exposure to bullying

Percentage of students who reported being bullied at least a few times per month or at least a few times per year (OECD average)



Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table III.8.1.

## Students, even adolescent students, need their parents' support

PISA data show that 15-year-old students whose parents routinely engage in home-based activities with them, such as eating a meal together or spending time “just talking”, not only score higher, but they are also more satisfied with their life. And students who regard their parents as being interested in their school life perform better, reported higher achievement motivation, and are more likely to be highly satisfied with their life than students who reported a lack of parental interest.

For some parents, spending time just talking with their child is a rare occurrence; others find it difficult to participate in their children’s school life because of inflexible work schedules, lack of childcare services, or language barriers. Schools can do a lot to help parents overcome these barriers.

Schools may reflect existing inequalities in the broader society; but school leaders can work to reduce the impact of these inequalities on students’ lives by creating a school environment that is welcoming, stimulating and inclusive for all teachers, staff members and students.

## Students should be encouraged to exercise, eat healthily and use the Internet wisely

PISA data show that physically active students report higher levels of satisfaction with their life. An effective physical and health education curriculum can not only make students value more physical activity outside of school, but also foster interaction skills and promote psychological well-being.

PISA does not collect data on students’ body image; but results from PISA 2015 suggest that some students, particularly girls, do not eat their meals regularly, possibly because they have an unrealistic idea of what they look like – or think they “should” look like. Efforts to promote positive body image and healthy lifestyle choices can be integrated into every school’s teaching programme as way to prevent eating disorders from developing, rather than as a response to existing problems.

Data from PISA also show that young people have fully embraced the Internet as a tool for socialising, and many think that the Internet is a great resource to search for the most up-to-date information. Teenagers often spend many hours on the Internet. Preventing the misuse of the Internet at school requires making sure that technologies are used at school for high-quality educational activities – which, in turn, calls for investments in professional and curriculum development.

## For more information

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**See:** OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

**Coming next month:** What do 15-year-olds really know about money?

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