

APPENDIX D:  
COUNTRIES SHOWING  
IMPROVEMENTS FROM  
2001 TO 2005/2006



Eight countries recorded significant increases in their students' mean reading literacy achievement, and the average performance of students in three of these countries – the Russian Federation, Hong Kong SAR, and Singapore – had been about the same as New Zealand in 2001. These three countries recorded the largest increases between the two cycles. Slovenia also recorded a relatively large increase in mean achievement.

Because of the sizeable shifts in achievement for these four countries, it is worth examining the context (structural and curricular) in which the changes occurred. The detail for this is described in both the *PIRLS 2001* and *PIRLS 2006 encyclopedias*. However, the information in Box D.1 encapsulates some of the details of the changes for these systems.

#### Box D.1: Context for changes in achievement in four countries in PIRLS-05/06

| Russian Federation   | Hong Kong SAR  | Singapore   | Slovenia  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p><i>Structural:</i> Primary education increased from 3 years to 4 years, with children to start at 6 years (rather than at age 7). In practice, children are still starting at 7. In 2001 about half of the Russian PIRLS cohort was still in the 3-year school system; by 2006 it had been completed. Average age increased over the cycle from 10.3 to 10.8 years.</p> <p><i>Curriculum:</i> Since 1998 there has been a major shift to 'literary reading' as part of philology (reading and writing in Russian). Compulsory content for the course includes techniques of reading; exposure to the world of books, including classic, modern, and foreign children's books, etc; and different genres of reading. This has been accompanied by increased usage of informational-type texts in other curriculum areas such as history and mathematics.</p> | <p><i>Curriculum:</i> Reforms in 2000 established clear reading goals for schools, including extensive work to promote children's reading comprehension skills in both Chinese and English. Schools were given the authority to adjust their curriculum and schedule to meet the literary needs of students. Teachers were encouraged to extend the range of teaching materials used in lessons. Another initiative was 'Reading Mothers', who were trained to work in schools to help students when reading stories. PIRLS-01 results raised further concerns about whether or not Hong Kong was meeting the literacy needs of its students. Special workshops were held for primary and pre-school teachers and parents about reading.</p> | <p><i>Curriculum:</i> A new syllabus was being implemented in 2001, when PIRLS was first administered, with implementation completed up to Grade 3. A wider range of instructional materials was used than previously. Learning outcomes were specified at 2-year intervals for English-language learning (including reading). This has given teachers more explicit information about the teaching of language at different schooling levels. The syllabus is under review again, with a focus on teaching approaches for diverse students and assessment practices.</p> | <p><i>Structural:</i> Primary education increased from 8 years to 9 years, with children now starting at 6 years (rather than at age 7). This change has been implemented gradually since 1999. In 2001 children in their 3rd year of schooling were tested in PIRLS. By 2006 about half had 4 years of schooling, so the average age is still about the same. The main purpose for changing the number of years in school was to improve literacy.</p> |

Note: Russian Federation students were assessed in Russian, Hong Kong SAR students in Modern Standard Chinese, Singaporean students in English, and Slovenian students in Slovenian.

Source: *PIRLS 2001 encyclopedia* (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Flaherty, 2002) and *PIRLS 2006 encyclopedia* (Kennedy, et al., 2007).