

France

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

France's education system is a state responsibility with the government's Ministry of National Education responsible for the definition and implementation of education policy. The Ministry's goals are to distribute resources allocated to education, guarantee equal access to this public service, and monitor education policies. Specifically, the government defines education policies and curricula; recruits, trains, and manages education staff; determines the status of schools and the rules under which they function; and appoints teachers and administrative staff. Only the state government may define and establish diploma levels.

The state takes responsibility for the definition of teaching curriculum, diploma distribution, personnel recruitment, and professional development at all levels. However, regions currently are responsible for overseeing investment; construction; reconstruction; extension; and major repairs, maintenance, and operations of the premises in upper secondary schools (*lycées*). Similarly, departments (smaller administrative entities) have the same responsibilities for lower secondary schools (*collèges*), while towns are responsible for the premises of local nursery and elementary schools. France provides free education for all students in primary and secondary schools.

Before 2019, schooling was compulsory for children ages 6 to 16. Since the start of the 2019–2020 academic year, schooling has been compulsory from age 3. However, in 2017, more than 880,000 students ages 3 to 5 attended preprimary school (*maternelle*), representing 97 percent of children in this age group. Therefore, the change in the age of compulsory education does not impact much since the large majority of families already send their children to *maternelles*. It ratifies a state of affairs, but specifies attendance rules more strongly. This had no impact on the academic progress of students assessed in PIRLS 2021.

Children attend the first grade of elementary school at the beginning of the school year (September) in the calendar year in which they reach age 6.

In the 2020–2021 academic year, there were 30,863 public schools and 4,642 private schools in France at the primary level (*maternelles* excluded).¹ The proportion of students enrolled in public state education at the primary level in France is 86 percent.² Private schools are primarily religious, mostly Roman Catholic, and are subject to monitoring by the state.

Since 2016, the organization of education at the primary and lower secondary levels is divided among four cycles:

- Cycle 1 comprises early learning (first, second, and third years of preprimary schooling).
- Cycle 2 comprises fundamental learning (Grades 1 to 3).
- Cycle 3 comprises the consolidation of learning (Grades 4 to 6), with sixth grade being the first grade of lower secondary schooling.
- Cycle 4 comprises the deepening (enhancing) of learning (Grades 7 to 9).

Hence, two levels divide primary schooling: the preprimary level (*maternelle*) covering Cycle 1 and the elementary level covering Cycles 2 and 3 up to fifth grade. Like elementary school, preprimary school (*maternelle*) is free of charge. General objectives of *maternelle* schools are to help children develop and form their personalities, and to prepare them for success in elementary school. This level emphasizes the mastery of language; children practice their speaking skills, begin to build their vocabulary, and learn to write. Artistic education is also an important part of the preprimary curriculum, as is discovering the universe of numbers. In 2021, the average class size in *maternelle* schools was 23.2 students.³

Schooling at the elementary level typically comprises five years, although the period may be increased or decreased by one year based on individual student knowledge. Promotion from primary to secondary education is automatic. At the primary level, many schools have classes composed of two or more grade levels. Some schools (mostly in rural areas) contain only a single class with all grade levels grouped together. Of these one-room schools, 98 percent are public, and in 2021, one-room schools accounted for 7 percent of French schools. During the 2020–2021 academic year, 46 percent of primary schools had one to four classes, 41 percent of schools had five to ten classes, and 13 percent had eleven or more classes.⁴ In 2021, the average class size in elementary schools was 21.9 students.⁵

Two successive levels divide secondary education: lower secondary and upper secondary. Lower secondary education comprises Grades 6 to 9 (typically ages 11 to 15). In 2020, the number of students enrolled in public and private lower secondary schools in France was 3.4 million.⁶ In 2020–2021, there were 5,294 public schools and 1,660 private schools at the lower secondary level in France.⁷ Upon completion of ninth grade, students attend a general and technological or a vocational upper secondary school that prepares them for the corresponding *baccalauréat*, a certification examination usually taken at age 18. There are three types of *baccalauréats*:

- General *baccalauréat*, which includes literature, economics, social studies, and science
- Technological *baccalauréat*, which includes tertiary science and technology, industrial science and technology, and laboratory science and technology
- Vocational *baccalauréat*, which includes production and services sectors

Languages

French Republic constitutional law states, “French is the language of the Republic.” French is also the language of instruction and the most widely spoken language in the country.

An amendment to the Constitution (Article 75-1) states, “Regional languages belong to the heritage of France.” In July 2021, a report to the Prime Minister titled *L’enseignement des langues régionales, état des lieux et perspectives* made a state of play for and provided perspectives of teaching regional languages. It showed that teaching of regional languages affected 60,000 students in primary education, i.e., approximately 0.9 percent of students enrolled at this level in the public and private sectors. The highest number of students instructed in regional languages received instruction in the regional language of Occitan, followed by Corsican, Catalan, Breton, Basque, and Creole.⁸

In elementary school, students can receive optional foreign language instruction, or EILE (international foreign language teaching). This additional instruction is available in third grade and above when families request it to maintain a link with their origin country. The courses offered last from 1.5 to 3 hours per week. In agreement with France, the partner countries—Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Serbia, and Croatia—provide qualified teachers, whose work is supervised and evaluated by French inspectors. Approximately 80,000 students participate in these courses.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

France participated in PIRLS for the fifth time during the 2021 assessment cycle. PIRLS 2001 presented the first international snapshot of student reading achievement in France. The results of further PIRLS assessments in 2006, 2011, and 2016 allowed for diachronic comparisons of student achievement and synchronic comparison in measuring France’s performance against that of other participating countries.

Despite dissemination efforts, public opinion paid little attention to PIRLS 2001 results, perhaps because student performance was above the international average. In addition, the performance of French students on previous large-scale studies of education achievement had not been unexpected or overly concerning.

PIRLS 2006 results had a greater impact because they allowed for monitoring the evolution of French student achievement in reading literacy over time. Comparison of student performance between 2001 and 2006 provided a useful indicator of the relevance of the new curriculum, especially on language skills, and of course on its impact on reading comprehension performance. However, PIRLS 2006 results were not significantly different from the 2001 results; consequently, the 2002 curriculum did not seem to have affected achievement.

Following PIRLS 2006 results that were confirmed by other information gathered nationally, the Ministry of Education reformed numerous aspects of primary school during the fall of 2008. Again, PIRLS 2011 results did not show any significant difference in overall student achievement. Of course, like all processes that take place in the education field, the implementation of a new curriculum takes a long time. Therefore, it is likely that the programs set up at the beginning of the 2008–2009 academic year had not been able to achieve their full potential by the 2011 evaluation.

Since PIRLS 2001, France’s overall performance has gradually declined with each PIRLS cycle. In PIRLS 2016, the decline in performance from 2001 was now significant (–14 points over the 15-year period). Performance based on comprehension of informational texts declined more than that of narrative texts, and students were least successful with the most complex comprehension processes (Interpreting, Integrating, and Evaluating).

In a press release dated December 5, 2017, Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister of National Education, stated that France’s PIRLS results were “once again unsatisfactory.” He continued, “This trend is a major concern. I want to give absolute priority to elementary school and the mastery of fundamental knowledge. This will be reflected in the division by two of the size of CP [first grade] and CE1 [second grade] classes in priority education areas.^a Recommendations will also emphasize the daily and central nature of reading, as well as the importance of systematically learning vocabulary, grammar and therefore spelling. In addition, we will provide teachers with a ‘State of the Research’ to help them base their reading instruction on the most recent scientific findings.”⁹

PIRLS 2021 results should provide information on the impact of these measures on student achievement, as well as the impact of the new 2015 curriculum since it has now been in use for six years; all students assessed in 2021 have followed this curriculum in their primary education. The 2021 results also will allow France to have valuable information regarding trends over a period of 20 years.

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades^b

France has a national curriculum that covers language and reading instruction for fourth grade; it has been renewed 11 times over a century. The national curriculum governs teacher practice. Teachers are responsible for building instruction that reflects a coherent progression through the curriculum, adapting the pace to suit students’ abilities and needs, defining their instruction strategies, and evaluating their students.

In November 2015, a new curriculum was presented and published in the *Bulletin Officiel* (official bulletin), and it was a new reference text that applies to learning in primary and lower secondary schools. The new curriculum was implemented at the beginning of the 2016–2017 academic year. It was refurbished lightly in September 2020, particularly in science, where elements have been added to raise students’ awareness of the issues of climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. The following sections describe this 2015 primary school curriculum.¹⁰

^a In 2021, this represented approximately 145,000 students in first grade and about the same number in second grade.

^b This section refers to the language/reading curriculum that was in use for the students assessed during PIRLS 2021.

Reading Policy

By mobilizing language in all its dimensions, *maternelles* prepare Cycle 1 students (ages 3 to 5) for the elementary grades by facilitating the process of learning to read. At the end of preschool, students should be able to:

- Communicate with adults and other children through language, making themselves understood
- Express themselves in syntactically correct and precise language; reformulate to be better understood
- Practice various uses of oral language: telling, describing, evoking, explaining, questioning, proposing solutions, discussing a point of view
- Say several rhymes and poems expressively and from memory
- Understand written texts with no other help than the language heard
- Demonstrate curiosity about the written word; be able to repeat the words of a written sentence and the words of the title of a book or text after an adult reads them
- Participate verbally in the production of a written document; know that writing is not the same as speaking
- Identify patterns in oral language in French (possibly in another language)
- Manipulate syllables
- Distinguish sounds (syllables, vowel sounds, some consonant sounds outside of consonant clusters)
- Recognize the letters of the alphabet and know the correspondences between the three ways of writing them: cursive, script, capital letters; copy using a keyboard
- Write his/her first name in cursive without a model
- Write a word independently using letters or groups of letters borrowed from known words

From ages 6 to 8 (Cycle 2, Grades 1 to 3), students become acquainted with the functioning of written language. This includes connecting sounds with letters, understanding the structure of sentences in simple texts, and understanding the differences between written and spoken language.

For the reading and reading comprehension learning area, the end-of-cycle expectations are:

- Identify words quickly: easily decode unknown regular words, recognize frequent words and memorized irregular words
- Read and understand a variety of texts adapted to the maturity and school culture of the students
- Read aloud with fluency, after preparation, a half-page text (1,400 to 1,500 typographic signs); participate in a dialogue reading after preparation
- Read at least 5 to 10 books in class per year

From ages 9 to 11 (Cycle 3, Grades 4 to 6), students are reading to learn. They begin encountering long, increasingly complex texts across all disciplines, which motivate them to think, be moved, enjoy themselves, and learn.

For the reading and reading comprehension learning area, the end-of-cycle expectations are:

- Read, understand, and interpret an age-appropriate literary text and react to its reading
- Read and understand texts and documents (texts, tables, graphs, diagrams, pictures) to learn in different disciplines
- Read and understand works of increasing length and complexity:
 - At fourth grade, five works of children’s literature and two works of heritage
 - At fifth grade, four works of children’s literature and three works of heritage
 - At sixth grade, three works of children’s literature and three works of heritage

Summary of Fourth Grade National Curriculum

Cycle 3 must consolidate and put to use the acquisitions of Cycle 2 in the service of other learning in a broad and diversified use of reading and writing. In general, mastery of the language remains a central objective of Cycle 3. The teaching in all disciplines should integrate speaking, reading, and writing activities.

The field of French thus articulates regular reading, writing, and oral activities, with more specific activities dedicated to the study of language (grammar, spelling, vocabulary) that allow students to understand its functioning and to acquire its rules. Oral and written expression and reading are predominant in the teaching of French, in connection with the study of texts, which allows the entry into a common literary culture.

In reading, explicit teaching of comprehension must continue by having students work with more complex texts and documents. Literature is also an essential part of the teaching of French: It develops the imagination, enriches knowledge of the world, and contributes to the construction of the self. In Cycle 3, the emphasis is on the student’s appropriation of the literary text, in connection with his or her experience, readings, knowledge, and those acquired in other disciplines, particularly history. Students are encouraged to read increasingly longer and more complex works, and where possible, to make personal reading choices based on their tastes in order to stimulate their interest. These readings are discussed during class time. Cycle 3 thus builds a first literary and artistic culture. During this cycle, the knowledge and skills worked on and associated with reading are as follows:

1. Read with fluency
 - Memorize the reading of frequent and irregular words
 - Automate decoding
 - Consider syntactic groups (groups of words with a unity of meaning) and punctuation marks in reading

2. Understand a literary text and make it his/her own
 - Implement a comprehension process based on a text heard or read: identify and memorize important information, in particular characters, their actions, and their relationships (stories, drama); relate this information; locate and relate logical and chronological links; relate the text to one's own knowledge; interpret from the relationship of clues, explicit or implicit, internal to the text or external (inferences)
 - Identify the genre and its issues; mobilize previous reading experiences and the knowledge that comes from them (universe, character types, scripts, etc.) and explicitly relate the text read to texts read previously and with the cultural knowledge of the readers and/or recipients
 - Mobilize lexical knowledge and knowledge about the universe evoked by the texts
 - Link texts and images
 - Build up the characteristics and specificities of literary genres (tale, fable, poetry, novel, short story, theater) and forms associating text and image (album, comic strip)
 - Construct literary notions (fiction/reality, character, stereotypes specific to the different genres) and first elements of contextualization in literary history
 - Use experience and knowledge of the world to express a reaction, a point of view, or a judgment on a text or a book
 - Put into voice a text, after preparation
3. Understand texts, documents, and images and interpret them
 - Implement a comprehension approach: identify and prioritize important information, relate this information to other information, locate and relate logical and chronological links and interpretations based on the relationship between explicit or implicit clues (inferences)
 - Explain the relations and external coherence elements (situations of enunciation and purpose of the document(s), context, nature, and source of the documents, etc.)
 - Mobilize lexical knowledge
 - Identify and construct characteristics and special features of genres specific to the teachings and disciplines
 - Identify and construct characteristics and specificities of forms of expression and representation (image, table, graph, and diagram)
 - Explicitly learn how to relate information in the case of documents combining several media (text, image, diagram, table, graph, etc.) or documents with hypertext links
 - Explicitly relate the document read to other documents read previously and to the student's cultural, historical, geographical, scientific, or technical knowledge
 - Identify the scope of the information contained in the document(s): singular (example, experiment, illustration) or general (characteristics, properties)

4. Monitor his/her comprehension and become an independent reader
 - Identify possible justifications for his/her interpretation or answers; identify support from the text and from other mobilized knowledge
 - Identify his/her difficulties; attempt to explain them
 - Maintain an active and reflective attitude: vigilance regarding the objective (comprehension, reading goals); adapt reading to his/her objectives; ask for help; implement strategies to solve his/her difficulties
 - Spontaneously use reading for learning or personal needs
 - Demonstrate autonomy in choosing a book adapted to his/her reading level according to his/her tastes and needs

Progression of Teaching

The end-of-year expectations set a horizon in terms of knowledge and skills with regard to the cycle. The following achievements illustrate what a student should be able to do in reading at the end of fourth grade (first year of Cycle 3):¹¹

- Read aloud a short text, after preparation, without confusing graphemes, even complex ones
- Memorize more and more frequent and irregular words
- Read a one-page text silently or aloud without effort
- When reading aloud, consider punctuation marks
- Correctly read an average of 110 words per minute
- In a text, identify explicit information and point out information that is not given
- Distinguish, based on the page layout, between a play, a poem, and a narrative text
- Relate the text read to another text studied in class
- Identify the nature and source of a document
- Identify the different genres represented and locate their major characteristics
- Find answers to questions in simple documents
- Discover composite documents and locate information through questioning

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teachers at primary schools in France do not specialize in a particular subject but are responsible for teaching all subjects to their class. However, a team of teachers may agree to collaborate and teach students by subject depending on the skills of each teacher. Teachers are prepared to teach at the preprimary or primary level, depending on their preference and the availability of jobs in the area where they wish to teach. In 2020, there were 334,000 primary school teachers in the public sector, 85 percent of whom were women. The average teacher age was 42.5, and 10 percent of teachers were working part-time.¹²

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

The first step to becoming a primary school teacher in France is to pass the CRPÉ (*Concours de Recrutement de Professeurs des Écoles*, [Recruitment Competition for School Teachers]), a competitive examination at the regional education authority level (*académie*). After passing the CRPÉ, candidates become teachers in training in the academy department in which they were recruited. They take a “sandwich course”^c for one year in which they divide their time between practice in schools and their own education in Higher Schools of Professorship and Education, known as INSPÉs (*Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation*). The Ministry of National Education specifies the number of jobs available each year.

From 1992 to 2011, primary school teachers were required to hold a diploma certifying at least three years of academic study in higher education to apply for teaching positions. In 2011, the prerequisites for taking the CRPÉ were modified, and a master’s degree (i.e., five years of higher education) was introduced as a new requirement.

On July 8, 2013, the French government established a new policy on teacher education and continuing professional development. INSPÉs opened their doors in September 2013, and a two-year master’s degree in education (*Masters des métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation*) program was initiated. There are 32 INSPÉs in France, with 179 training sites. The beginning of the 2015–2016 academic year marked the entry of the first graduates of the new program into full-time teaching positions. Students in the new INSPÉ teacher education programs choose from among several fields of specialization, including teaching in primary education, teaching in secondary education, working as nonteaching school staff, and teaching in adult education programs. Approximately 60,000 students are studying in these four INSPÉ program fields.

The new teacher education program focuses on practical training. The core principle is that the most effective initial training programs are those that guarantee a balance between theory and practice and collaboration between teachers. Future teachers have early contact with students, spend considerable time in schools, and receive quality support, including mentoring by qualified teachers. The program includes a core curriculum offered to all student teachers that might include (but is not limited to): managing a class and preventing violence at school; considering diversity in the classroom, particularly students with disabilities; adapting to different learning styles and providing support for struggling students; receiving career guidance; combatting discrimination; and promoting gender equality. A particular emphasis is placed on mastering digital tools to help future teachers implement digital tools in classroom learning, encourage them to create pedagogical resources adapted to individual students, and allow them to have better communication with students’ families. Students in the master’s program must take a competitive

^c A sandwich course refers to training that alternates study sessions with classroom practice.

examination at the end of their first year; during their second year, they work in schools to gain practical experience as state civil service trainees.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

In addition to their initial vocational training, primary school teachers may complete up to 36 weeks of professional development over the course of their career (the equivalent of a school year), although professional development is not mandatory. Local and national education priorities determine the content of annual in-service training courses offered at each level, and the teaching of reading comprehension is generally featured in these courses.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Parents regularly receive school report cards, facilitating communication between teachers and families. Report cards detail the results of periodic competency assessments, recommendations for student promotion to the next grade or cycle, and final decisions. The cycle council decides whether students will be promoted to the next cycle, taking teacher recommendations into account. In France, there are no crucial examinations for students at the primary level, and promotion or retention depends on academic progress at certain key points rather than at the end of each grade.

The Personal Skills Booklet (*Livret Personnel de Compétences*) comprises part of the school report card and provides evidence of student attainment of the common base of knowledge and skills from primary school to the end of compulsory education.¹³ Attainment of the common base of knowledge, skills, and culture is progressive. The booklet contains certificates of common base knowledge and skills attained. At every stage, schools inform families of student progress. At the end of primary school, the booklet is passed on to the appropriate lower secondary school. The booklet is also available online.

The skills that students are expected to achieve are fixed for each cycle. If students have not met the required competencies at the end of a cycle, the cycle council may recommend retention for one year, and the head of school would present the recommendation to parents. If parents disagree, they may appeal to the inspector of schools, who makes the final decision regarding promotion or retention. Over the past couple decades, lowering retention rates has become a priority in the French education system. In 2001, the rate of students who were at least one year behind at the end of primary school was 19.5 percent. By 2006, the rate had fallen to 16.2 percent. It fell to 13.2 percent in 2010, 10.4 percent in 2014, and now represents 5 percent of students in 2021. Therefore, this rate has been divided by 4 in 20 years.

Special Reading Initiatives

Every year, the Ministry of Education organizes and/or supports a number of nationwide literacy events. These events serve several purposes but primarily aim to facilitate an interest in reading and to promote access to reading outside of school. Some examples of these activities and organizations that promote them include:

- Week of the Media in School—All teachers are invited to participate in a civic education activity to help students become familiar with printed media.¹⁴
- Poets’ Spring—Thousands of activities occur nationwide during a week devoted to promoting poetry.¹⁵
- Week of the French Language and the French Speaking World—Schools participate in hundreds of events organized throughout the country. Students often participate through theme projects focusing on the importance of France’s literary heritage and on literacy as a key to self-enjoyment.¹⁶
- Read and Help Read—To encourage an interest in reading and literature, retired persons coordinate with teachers and schools to share the pleasure of reading with elementary school students.¹⁷
- *Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illettrisme* (National Agency to Fight Against Illiteracy) is an entity that plays a significant role in promoting literacy. It organizes the National Action Days Against Illiteracy, among others.¹⁸
- For 2021–2022, the President of the Republic has chosen reading as a major national cause. The aim is not only to extend and amplify the daily action of the school and to enable students to master reading, but also to promote a daily practice of reading, both in and out of school.¹⁹
- Creation of an internet open access series of books called *The Fundamental Guides to Teaching*²⁰—As the Minister committed in the PIRLS 2016 press release on December 5, 2017, a series of works have been published that provide teachers with a State of the Research to help them base their reading instruction on the most recent scientific findings. Of particular note is the latest one published, in reference to PIRLS: *Reading Comprehension in Grades 4 & 5*.²¹

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In mid-March 2020, the epidemiological situation related to COVID-19 evolved rapidly. More than 147,000 cumulative cases were confirmed worldwide, with approximately 72,500 recoveries and 5,500 fatalities. More than 150 countries and territories were affected, with major outbreaks in China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, Spain, France, and Germany.²² The World Health Organization (WHO) declared “Europe to be the epicenter of the pandemic.”²³

In response, on March 16, 2020, schools in France closed their doors to students. Schools prepared individually for weeks of closure, with some relying on the National Center for Distance Learning (CNED)^d or digital workspaces, while others preferred email communication between students and teachers. Nevertheless, elementary school teachers took turns to continue welcoming the children of caregivers, which allowed those parents to go to work.

Pedagogical continuity was implemented to maintain regular contact between students and their teachers. To this end, the teachers ensured, in particular by making use of existing networks (such as digital workspaces and electronic mail), that students had access to course materials and were able to carry out the homework or exercises required for their learning. This pedagogical continuity service was based in particular on a free pedagogical platform of the CNED called My Class at Home.^e This service offered a way to hold virtual classes, thus maintaining the human link between the student, his/her classmates, and his/her teacher.

This period ended after two months with the reopening of schools on June 22, 2020, according to strict mandatory sanitary protocol and the rules of normal presence in schools and colleges. Although schools reopened very close to the break for summer vacation, it was important for educators to resume contact with students before the end of the school year and to officially close such an unprecedented period.

Since the start of the 2020–2021 academic year, the Ministry’s guideline in response to the health crisis has been to keep schools and facilities open and to do everything possible to avoid further across-the-board and national closures. “In the interest of students,” the goal is to “maintain the best learning conditions and student well-being.”²⁴ In fact, there have been no other nationwide school closures to date (as of the end of the 2021–2022 academic year). Of course, locally, classes or even schools may have closed due to a difficult epidemiological situation; however, decisions now are made by local authorities to adapt much more closely to local health situations.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

The period of closure related to the health crisis from March to May 2020 is a unique event in the history of France’s schools. The Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (DEPP, the statistical service of the Ministry of Education) has mobilized to shed light on the health crisis and its consequences on students’ learning and school careers. The DEPP’s work focuses in particular on documenting the differences observed according to the sociodemographic situations of school personnel; students and their families; and the characteristics of their schooling context.

^d The *Centre National d’Enseignement à Distance* (CNED) was created in 1939 to compensate for the disorganization of education due to the Second World War.

^e See <https://www.cned.fr/l-actualite-de-la-formation/le-cned-de-a-a-z/mes-classes-virtuelles> for more information about My Class at Home. For the CNED presentation in English, see <https://www.cned.fr/decouvrir-le-cned/the-cned-at-the-service-of-all-success-stories/english-resources>

The DEPP has set up new operations, used existing systems, or added questions to surveys already planned. This has made it possible to evaluate certain consequences and to report on inequalities. This has led to 12 publications,^f 7 of which concern elementary school. For example, there is a briefing note on principals' perspectives on the impact of the health crisis,²⁵ a note on the experiences of families of students in Grades 1 and 2 during the lockdown and closure of schools,²⁶ and a note on the evolution of student performance at the beginning of Grades 1 and 2 between 2019 and 2020.²⁷ Finally, there is a note also published in English titled *Health Crisis of 2020 and Pedagogical Continuity*.²⁸

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

As noted above, school closure and lockdown occurred in France in spring 2020, which was the time to gather information for the field test according to PIRLS procedures. The beginning of the field test period was scheduled for March 16, 2020 (the same day as the lockdown). Everything to carry out this field test was in place at the DEPP, in the sampled schools, and with the test administrators. This field test was all the more important since it was to check and validate the feasibility of gathering information in digital mode. The reopening of schools at the end of June did not allow the operation to be relaunched, and the summer vacations at the beginning of July marked the end of any field testing. Due to the lack of information from a field test and difficulties with a small pilot at the start of the 2020–2021 academic year, it was decided to return to the paper format for PIRLS 2021.

The PIRLS main test in 2021 was complicated but possible, thanks to the Ministry's decision not to close schools. The inevitable local closures of classes or schools led to an extension of the testing period to allow as many students as possible to take the test. The possibilities for testing at each school had to be managed almost individually. In the end, only a few classes or schools were not able to carry out the test administration, and it was a relief that this did not jeopardize the reliability of the data collection.

Suggested Readings

Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, Direction de l'Évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance. (2021). *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* [Statistical references on education, formation and research]. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/92540/download>

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^f See <https://www.education.gouv.fr/la-depp-et-l-impact-de-la-crise-sanitaire-305177> for more information on the different approaches used by the DEPP to shed light on the consequences of the health crisis. For the presentation in English, see <https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/71641/download>

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