

YOUTH LITERACY SKILLS

WHAT IS IT?

An assessment of the literacy skills of 15-year-old Canadians, according to the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The Composite Learning Index includes mean scores for literacy in reading, mathematics, problem-solving and science.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARNING IN CANADA?

Advanced literacy skills, including literacy in reading, math, problem-solving and science, are essential for Canadian youth to be successful in the workforce and life.

Literacy skills are critical indicators of the preparedness of young Canadians for the workplace and further education.¹ They give young people the capacity for innovative thinking and the adaptability required in today's knowledge-based economy. People with high levels of literacy are also more likely to be engaged in society, which benefits them and the communities they live in.

CANADA ABOVE INTERNATIONAL AVERAGES IN READING, MATHEMATICS, PROBLEM-SOLVING AND SCIENCE

According to the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 15-year-olds in Canada scored above OECD averages in all three literacy areas: reading, math and science. This also holds true for problem-solving skills, which were last assessed by PISA in 2003.

PISA 2006 represents the first full assessment of science literacy across the world. Canada's science scores put it in the top seven of 57 countries for 2006, significantly behind Finland and Hong-Kong China, roughly at the same level as Chinese Taipei and Japan, and significantly above Australia, Germany and the United States (see *Chart 1*).

While all of Canada's provinces performed at or above the OECD average, significant differences were apparent in the results of

individual provinces (see *Chart 1*). Also, students in French-language schools outside of Quebec performed at a lower level in science than students enrolled in Anglophone schools.

Canada is doing better than most countries in ensuring that students learn to read and write, regardless of household income. Although socio-economic status remains a factor in Canada's literacy rates, PISA scores show that income has had less of an effect here than in most other countries around the world.

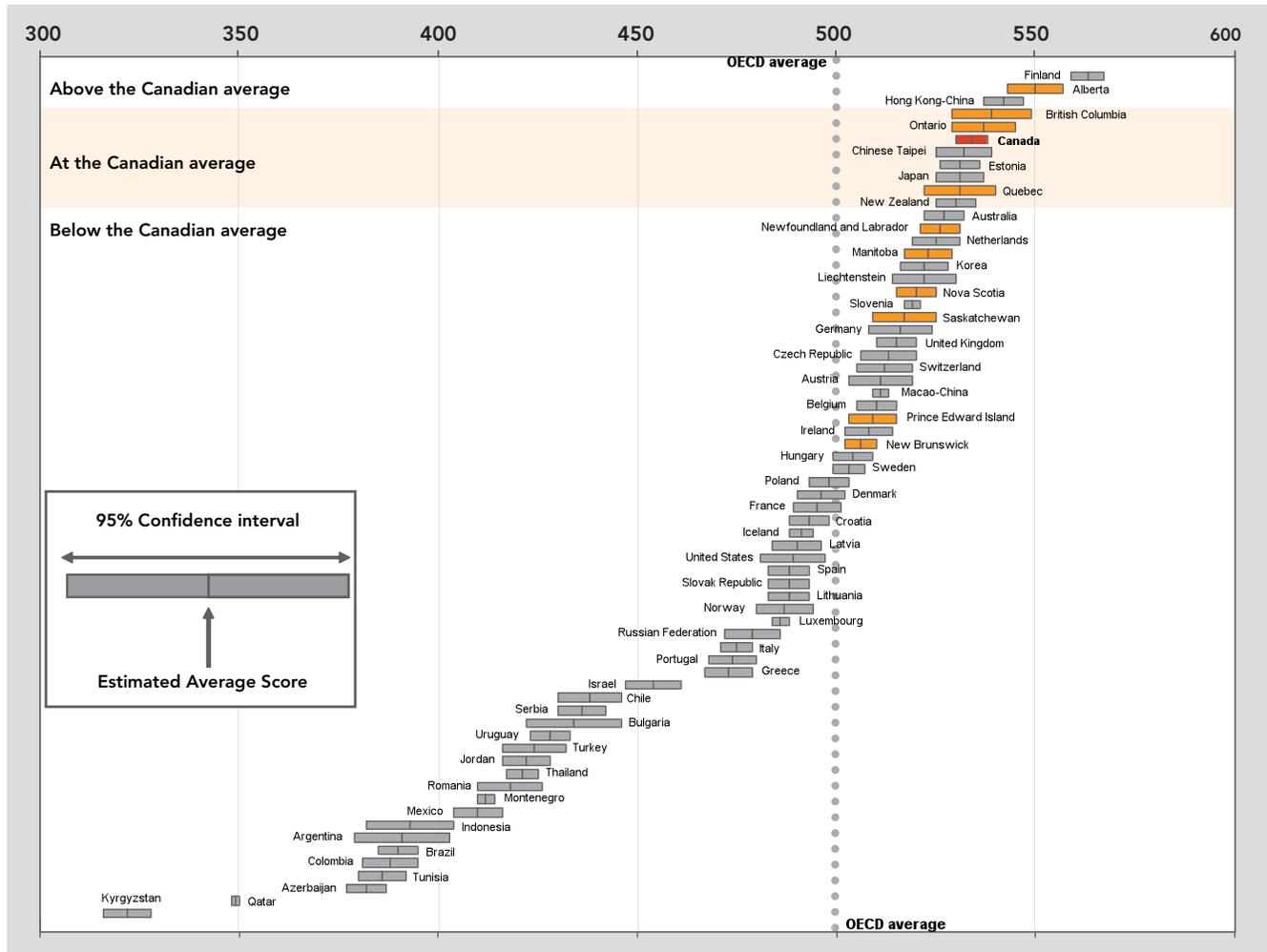
PROJECTIONS FOR ADULT LITERACY

In June 2008, CCL released *Reading the Future*, a ground-breaking report that shows the number of adults in Canada with low literacy skills is growing. By 2031 the number is forecast to reach 15 million, an increase of more than three million people. The study contradicts the commonly held belief that Canada's strong PISA scores will improve Canada's adult literacy over time. *Reading the Future* also provides a profile of those adults with lower literacy skills. The report, accompanied by video profiles and an online tool that projects literacy levels, is available at www.ccl-cca.ca/readingthefuture.



¹ Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey* (Ottawa and Paris: 2005).

CHART 1: International comparisons of science scores (including Canadian provinces), 15-year-olds, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study, The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics, 2006 First Results for Canadians Aged 15 (Ottawa: 2008), Catalogue no. 81-590-XPE—3.

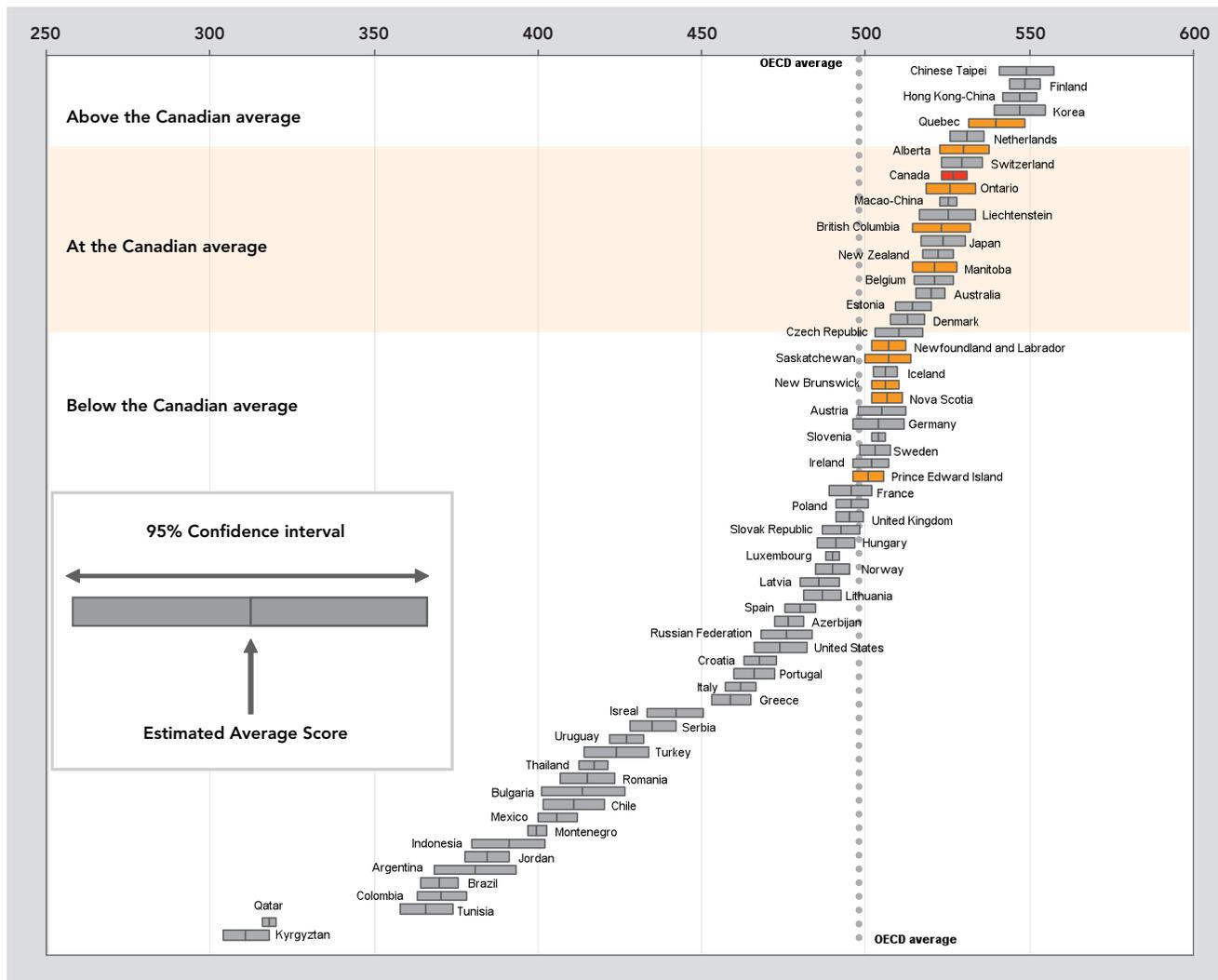
Note: Canada's PISA score in this chart is 534 and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 4 points, 19 times out of 20.

For an in-depth look at the literacy challenges facing Canada, please see Chapter 6 of CCL's 2007 report titled *State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency*, at www.ccl-cca.ca/solr.

PISA 2006 marks the OECD's second assessment of math-literacy performance. In 2006, Canadian students placed in the top 12 of 57 countries—significantly behind Chinese Taipei, Finland, Hong Kong-China and Korea (see *Chart 2*). Canada placed roughly at the same level as the Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan, and ahead of Sweden, France and the United States.

There were no significant changes in math-literacy performance between 2003 and 2006, for Canada or for any other country. Within Canada, students in Quebec and Alberta had the highest math performance, even though Alberta's score decreased between 2003 and 2006 (see *Chart 2*).

CHART 2: International comparisons of math scores (including Canadian provinces), 15-year-olds, 2006



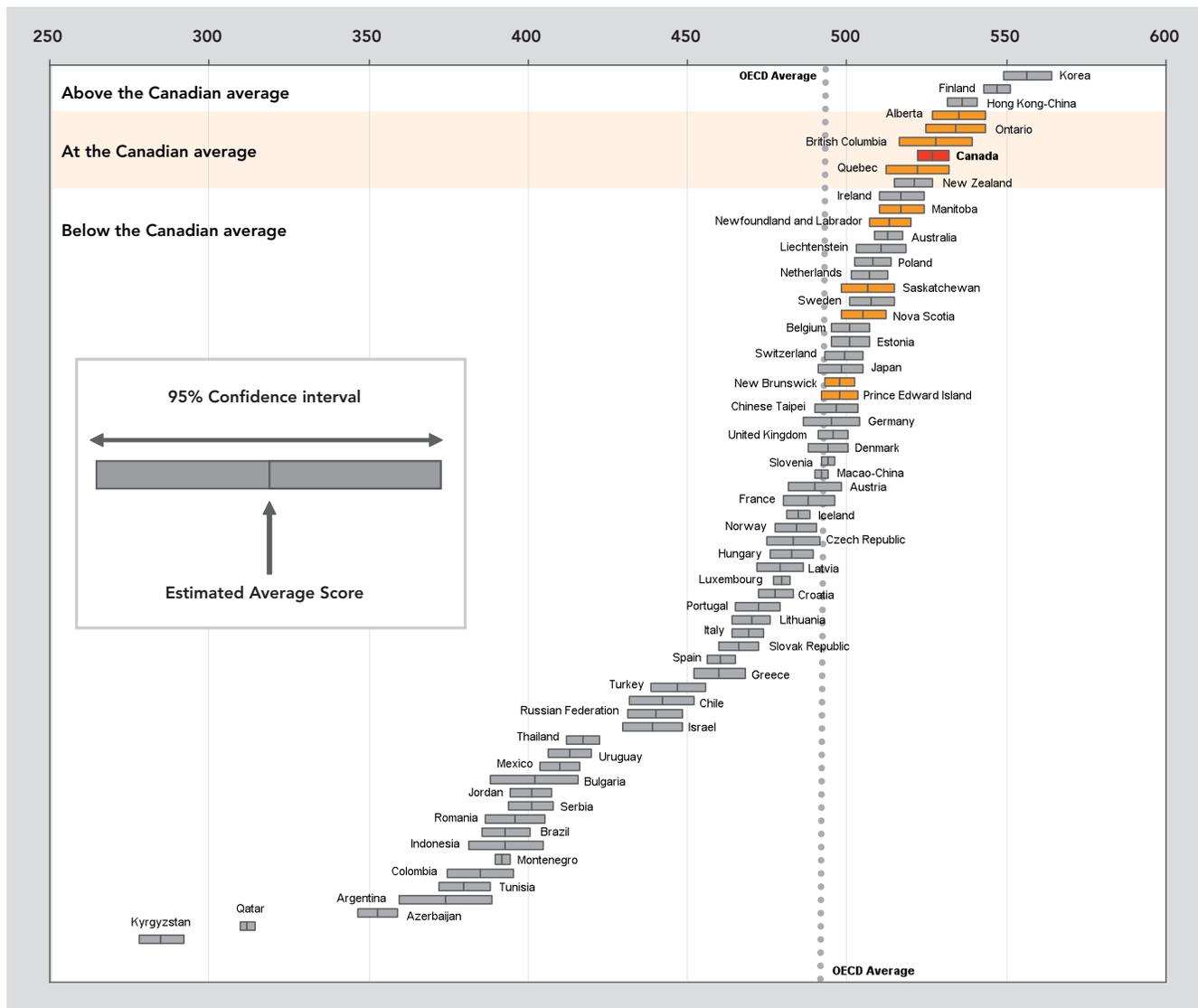
Source: Statistics Canada, Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study, The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics, 2006 First Results for Canadians Aged 15 (Ottawa: 2008), Catalogue no. 81-590-XPE—3.

Note: Canada's PISA score in this chart is 527 and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 4 points, 19 times out of 20.

PISA 2006 marks the third international assessment of reading performance. Canada, like most OECD countries, showed stable reading scores between 2000 and 2006. Both Hong Kong-China and Korea saw improvements in reading performance over this same period, explaining why they out-performed Canada in 2006 for the first time (see Chart 3).

Within Canada, reading scores have remained stable across all provinces since 2000, except in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, where scores decreased.

CHART 3: International comparisons of reading scores (including Canadian provinces), 15-year-olds, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study, The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics, 2006 First Results for Canadians Aged 15 (Ottawa: 2008), Catalogue no. 81-590-XPE—3.

Note: Canada's PISA score in this chart is 527 and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 4.8 points, 19 times out of 20.