Proposed: An International Education Assessment for Ohio

Ohio should take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the 2009 round of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This is the first time in the history of the international testing program that U.S. states are being offered the chance to participate and receive data back on their students.1

The Achieve, Inc. report presented to the State Board of Education on February 13th has called for some far-ranging changes in the way Ohio tests its students. Not the least of these is a call to participate in something called the Program for International Student Assessment or PISA as its known, but what is PISA?

Simply put, PISA is a standardized assessment or survey jointly developed by member nations of the Organization For Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and administered to 15-year-olds approaching the end of schooling, a kind of international graduation test, if you will.

As OECD notes, “PISA assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. In all cycles, the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are covered not merely in terms of mastery of the school curriculum, but in terms of important knowledge and skills needed in adult life.”2

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On the national level, somewhere between 4,500 to 50,000 students are usually surveyed and nearly one million students world-wide have participated to date.

PISA states that its assessment has covered roughly 90% of the world’s economy to date. Over 10 major publications have been produced and can be viewed at: http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_1_1_1_1,00.html.

PISA is and can be many things. It provides information for policy-makers and enables the monitoring of results over time for participating nations and states. It also provides for multiple international comparisons. Some hope (or fear) that it will help create a world-wide education agenda. One thing is certain, participation will put the results of Ohio’s education system on an international stage for the first time.

Is PISA right for Ohio? That’s a decision that should, perhaps, be widely shared.

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2 What PISA Assesses at: http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2966,en_32252351_32235918_1_1_1_1_1_1,00.html