



Do parents of 15-year-olds know many of their child's school friends and their parents?

PISA

PISA in Focus #98



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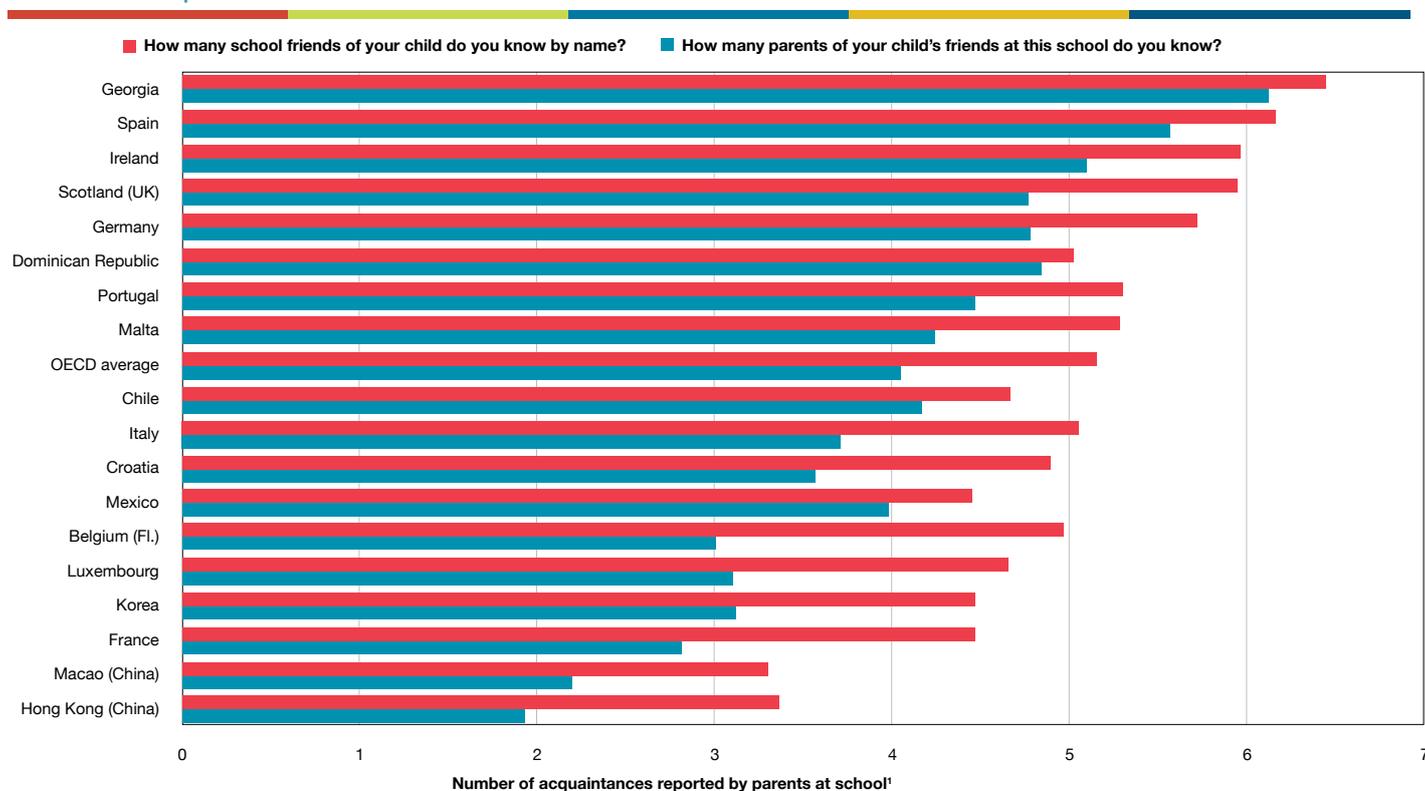
- On average across OECD countries, parents of 15-year-old students reported that they know five of their child's school friends by name and four of the child's friends' parents. Parents in Georgia, Ireland and Spain reported knowing the most friends and parents, while parents in France, Hong Kong (China) and Macao (China) knew the fewest.
- In most countries and economies the parents of children attending socio-economically advantaged schools knew more of their child's friends and their parents than the parents of children in disadvantaged schools.
- Students whose parents knew more of their friends and their friends' parents scored higher in collaborative problem solving and reported fewer bullying experiences, even after accounting for socio-economic status.

Parents often establish fruitful relationships with teachers, students and other parents at their child's school. By doing so, they might gain new friends and help their child's academic career; but more crucially, they may contribute indirectly to the common good of the school – by reinforcing the norms of behaviour at school, spreading important information, generating trust and/or connecting the school with the wider community.

PISA asked parents from the 18 countries and economies that chose to distribute the parent questionnaire how many of their child's school friends they know by name and how many of their parents they know. On average across the OECD education systems that distributed the parent questionnaire, parents reported that they know about five of their child's school friends and four of the parents of their child's friends. But there are wide differences across countries and economies. Parents in Georgia, Ireland and Spain knew the most of both, while parents in Hong Kong (China) and Korea and Macao (China) knew the fewest. In Georgia, for instance, parents reported knowing an average of six other school parents – three times more than parents in Hong Kong (China) reported.

Mingling with members of the school community may come more naturally to parents in some countries than in others, but there may be other explanations for the observed country differences in the number of parents' school acquaintances. In Spain, for instance, 15-year-old students in public schools are required to switch school premises usually once in their lifetime – at around age 12 – while in France they are required to do so as many as three times – at around ages 6, 11 and 15. Spanish students, and their parents, thus have greater opportunities to build stable relationships than their French counterparts, if only because making friends takes time.

Parents' acquaintances at school



1. Parents who answered "6 or more" were assigned a value of "7".

Note: Only countries and economies that distributed the parent questionnaire are shown. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the number of acquaintances. **Source:** OECD, PISA 2015 Database.

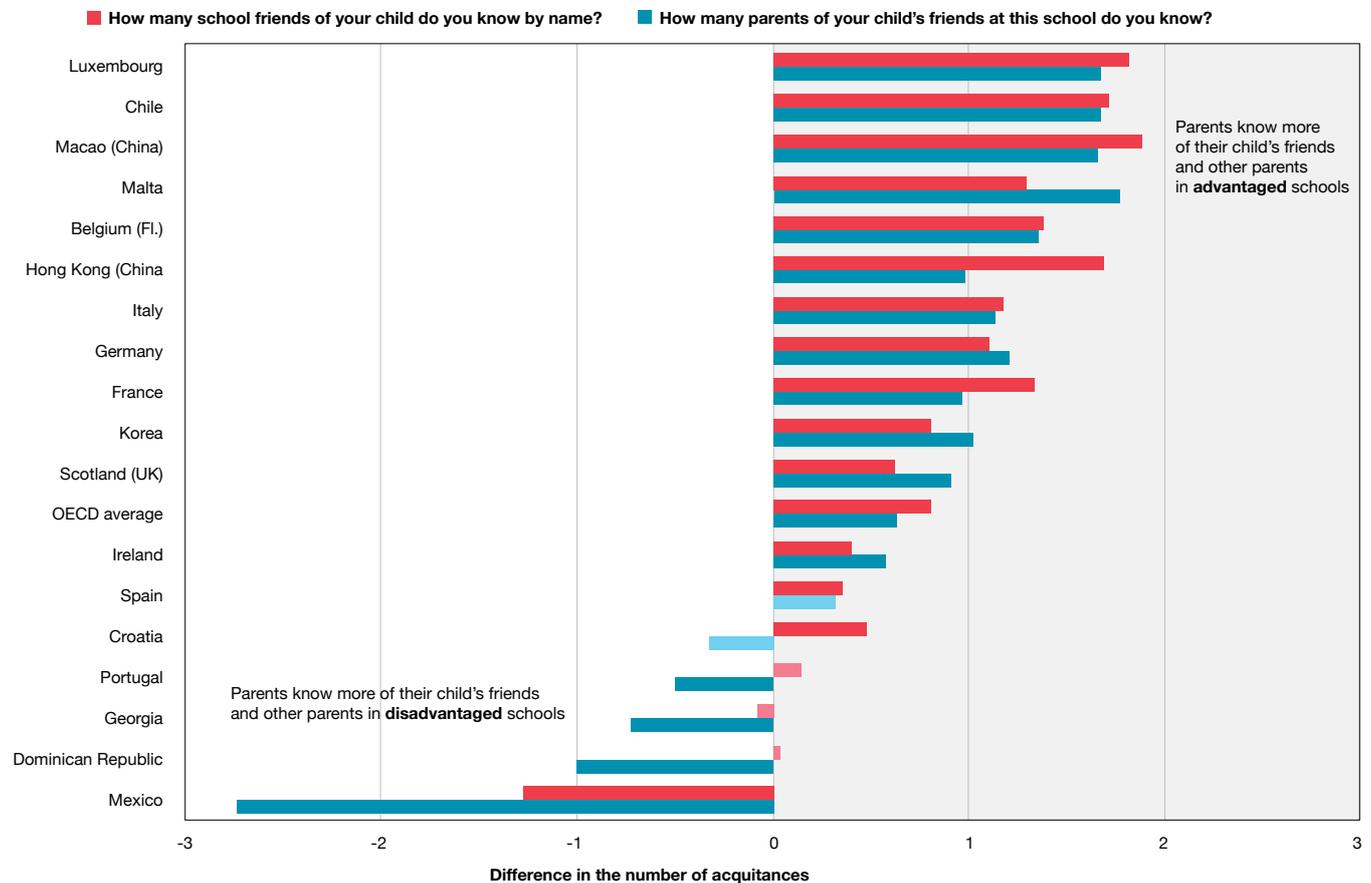
Parents' familiarity with other parents in their child's school may also be shaped by their involvement in school-related activities, especially by their attendance at conferences for parents. In the school systems where parents of 15-year-olds knew the largest number of their child's friends and parents of their friends, including Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Scotland (United Kingdom) and Spain, at least 8 out of 10 parents had attended a scheduled meeting or conference for parents during the previous academic year, whereas in the countries where parents knew the smallest number, including France, Hong Kong (China), Korea and Macao (China), fewer than 7 out of 10 had attended such events. In Hong Kong (China) only 3 in 10 parents had attended a scheduled meeting or conference for parents.

In most countries and economies that distributed the parent questionnaire, the parents of children attending socio-economically advantaged schools knew more of their child's school friends and other parents than parents of children in disadvantaged schools. This socio-economic gap was particularly large in school systems where parents reported having fewer acquaintances at school, on average, such as the Flemish Community of Belgium, Hong Kong (China), Luxembourg and Macao (China), but also in Chile and Malta. Interestingly, in Mexico and, to a lesser extent, the Dominican Republic, Georgia and Portugal, parents of students in advantaged schools knew fewer of their child's friends and other parents than parents of children who attended disadvantaged schools.



Differences in parents' number of acquaintances, by schools' socio-economic profile

Difference between schools in the top and bottom quartiles of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status



Notes: Statistically significant differences are shown in a darker tone. Only countries and economies that distributed the parent questionnaire are shown. Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in the number of parents' acquaintances at school. **Source:** OECD, PISA 2015 Database.

Socially connected parents can bring many benefits to their children

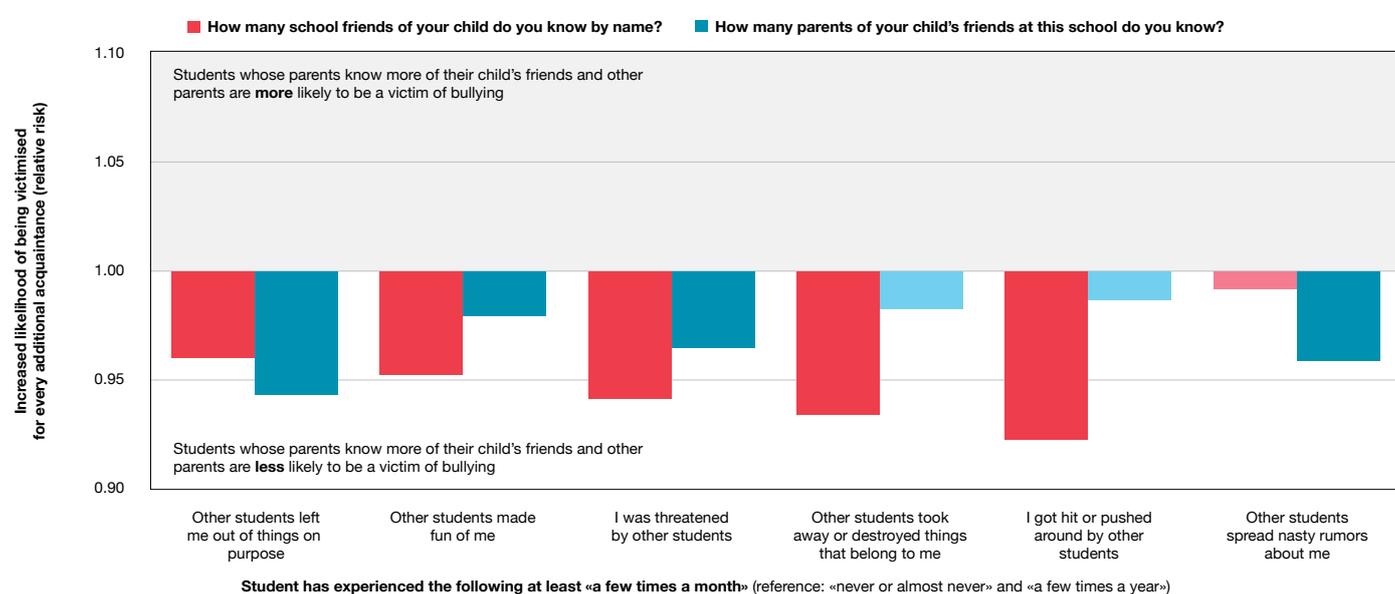
When the parents of schoolmates know their children's friends and each other – a state often referred to as intergenerational closure – students may benefit. While PISA cannot prove cause and effect, PISA results are in line with this expectation. The first PISA report on collaborative problem solving, for example, showed that, on average across OECD countries, 15-year-old students scored higher in collaborative problem solving, and valued relationships and teamwork more when their parents knew more of their friends and their friends' parents, even after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools. For instance, students scored two points higher in collaborative problem solving for each additional schoolmate the parents reported knowing.

This scenario may prove particularly beneficial for controlling and preventing bullying. A bully might think twice before threatening, making fun of or hurting another student if he or she believes that their parents know each other. Bullied children may also feel safer if their parents have relationships with other parents and with the school staff. More important,

setting and enforcing consistent norms to address bullying should be easier when parents know each other and their child's friends. PISA data show that, on average across the OECD countries that distributed the parent questionnaire, students whose parents know more of their friends' parents were less likely to have been a victim of bullying, especially of relational types of bullying, even after accounting for socio-economic status. For instance, the likelihood of being left out of things on purpose at least a few times per month decreased by six percent points for each additional friend's parent that a student's parent reported knowing. Students were also less likely to report having been bullied, especially physically bullied, when their parents knew more of their school friends by name. For example, a student whose parent reported not knowing any of their school friends was 50% more likely to have been hit or pushed around by other students a few times a month than a student whose parent reported knowing five of their school friends.

Parents' acquaintances at school and bullying

OECD average



Notes: Statistically significant differences are shown in a darker tone.
Relative risk, after accounting for socio-economic status.
The OECD average includes only the countries that distributed the parent questionnaire.
Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database.

The bottom line

In schools where parents know their children's friends and their families, students are more likely to develop their skills, improve their attitudes towards collaboration, and feel happier and safer at school. These acquaintances often develop naturally in day-to-day interactions, and can turn into real friendships. To nurture these relationships, schools can start by providing a welcoming atmosphere. They can organise parties and conferences for their students' families, creating opportunities for parents to get involved in school activities and setting informal norms for student behaviour.



For more information

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See: OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume V): Collaborative Problem Solving*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264285521-en>.

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