

Tracey Sherlock, Vancouver Sun, December 7, 2016 3:17 PM PST

B.C. students are the world's best when it comes to reading, an international assessment shows.

And they're not too shabby in science or math either, scoring third in the world in science and eighth in math on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA.)

PISA is an international standardized test for Grade 10 students that measures their skills in reading, science and math.

"These results come thanks to hard work by the students, the skills and efforts of our teachers, and from the strength of our education system," said Mike Bernier, B.C.'s education minister. "Our new curriculum is going to help make sure that our students continue to have great outcomes and connect with the skills they need to succeed in our changing world."

B.C. Teachers Federation president Glen Hansman said there are a lot of criticisms about PISA that should be recognized, notably that it emphasizes a business-oriented, competitive model of education sometimes at the expense of the social and cultural purposes of education. He also said even though B.C. students performed well on PISA, people shouldn't lose sight of the fact that aboriginal graduation rates aren't as high as they should be and that students with special needs aren't adequately having their needs met.

Despite those concerns, the 2015 results are higher than the last test in 2012 when B.C. students performed second in reading, third in science and 10th in math. In 2015, only students in Singapore and Alberta outperformed B.C. students in science. In math, Singapore students also received top marks and Quebec was the third top performer. B.C. was the second-highest Canadian province, after Quebec. Singapore was second to B.C. in reading.

The tests are conducted every three years by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and include students from 72 countries and all 10 Canadian provinces. The PISA report says Canada is notable for having high reading scores since PISA began 15 years ago. The report calls that stability "a remarkable achievement."

Canada also stands out for equality in its students' performance. The report notes that socio-economic status can affect students' performance in school, but says that Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong and Macau stand out by achieving both high performance and high equity in education opportunities.

[tsherlock@postmedia.com](mailto:tsherlock@postmedia.com)