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CONTACT: Dr Nawal Al Sheikh
Communications Manager
Tel: 4559361
Fax: 4659444

Nawal.alsheikh@sec.gov.qa

PISA 2006 Results Underscore Urgency of Education Reform

Doha, Qatar – December 5, 2007: Students in Qatar are lagging behind the countries participating in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006, according to PISA - Qatar National Report, released today. The PISA study measures the proficiency of 15-year-olds students in three subjects: Mathematic, science and reading, focusing on their ability to apply learning in a real-world context. The 2006 study focused on science, while still testing all three subjects.

The report also showed that a majority of Qatar's students tested were below Level 1 in all three subjects, with Level 1 being considered the minimum threshold to respond to the easiest test questions. Very few students in Qatar placed in the top levels of performance (Levels 4, 5 and 6).

“The findings of the PISA study show that there is a great deal of work to be done to ensure our students are competitive in the global market. This report once more underscores the urgency of education reform in Qatar,” said Adel Al-Sayed, Director of the Evaluation Institute. “With the pillars of Education for a New Era already in place, we can expect more rapid and sustained improvement in student performance in the coming years.” he added

This is the first time Qatar participated in this assessment study and the results will be used as a benchmark for future progress. Qatar is the first country in the Gulf-region to participate in PISA and was praised in the report for its boldness in assessing its students during the early stages of reform.

Overall, Finland ranked first in science and math, while Korea ranked first in reading. in PISA, which is administered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Qatar's average scores in all three subjects were well below those of the industrialized OECD member countries.

The report states that Qatar's low levels of proficiency in science are likely attributable to the lack of fundamental reading and mathematics literacy in the 15-year-olds tested. Reading was cited as fundamental to being able to answer the most basic questions in all subjects. The more difficult questions required not only reading for comprehension, but also the ability to apply information to a real-life situation.

“It is likely that the students participating in the PISA study were not exposed to the benefits of education reform long enough and that they began learning new curriculum too late to greatly affect their performance,” said Dr.



Hamda Al-Sulaiti assistant director of Evaluation Institute “The recent results of PIRLS [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study] that showed fourth-graders in Qatar’s independent schools demonstrating signs of improved literacy give us great hope for the future.” she added

The PISA study showed that girls in Qatar performed better on average than boys in all three subjects tested. In most countries, boys performed better on mathematics and science, with girls performing better in reading. The report also showed that students in the Ministry of Education schools outperformed the students in independent schools on average, however there was a wide range of scores for the individual schools. The top-performing students in Qatar overall attended the private international schools. Most of the results correlated directly with the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment (QCEA) program findings. Each school will receive an individual report of their students’ results.

The Supreme Education Council will use the PISA findings, along with findings from other international studies, to monitor progress of the reform and develop future policies and programs. Many of the elements cited by the report necessary for improved educational outcomes are already in place in Qatar, including internationally benchmarked education standards, a state-of-the-art standardized assessment and monitoring system, professional standards for teachers, professional development opportunities for teachers, and curriculum guidelines that promote critical thinking and problem solving. The report also praised Qatar’s commitment to assign significant resources to the education reform effort.

A consortium of world-class researchers, from the Universities of New Brunswick and British Columbia, led by Scott Murray, former Director of Social Statistics of Statistics Canada and with the participation of Drs. Douglas Willms, under the coordination of experts from the Evaluation Institute, at the Supreme Education Council, developed the Qatar PISA 2006 National Report.

Full copies of the international and national PISA reports are available on the SEC website at www.english.education.gov.qa/

International studies provide comparable data to the participating countries highlighting their education systems position at the global level, and identifying the weaknesses and strengths. This allows the participating countries to build on the shortcomings and hence building world-class education systems. In addition to PISA, Qatar also participated in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS).

*The Supreme Education Council was established by Emiri decree in 2002. It serves as the primary authority on education policy in Qatar and, with its three Institutes, is leading the effort to transform the nation’s schools into a modern, world-class education system. More information about Qatar’s education reform effort, **Education for a New Era**, is available at www.education.gov.qa.*