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PISA Scores: Grounding Perspectives

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) administers the Programme International Standard Assessment (PISA) every three years in reading, science, and mathematics. Results of this test are analyzed to calculate a PISA score (along with reports and other data), where the purported achievement of students in mathematics is publicized as a single number. These PISA scores have declined in Canada (and for many of the member states in the OECD) from 2000 - 2022. Do the results on the PISA tests mean that student performance in mathematics is declining in Canada over time? Does this mean that the quality of the mathematics education system is deteriorating? These questions are not as simple to answer as they first seem. PISA is a unique assessment that assesses cumulative student knowledge (not just what students learn in school), and the OECD has made multiple changes to their assessment over time. This talk will include a critical discussion of these changes, an examination of how PISA scores are determined, how these results impact policy making, and how mathematicians can contribute to the critical discussion surrounding the use of PISA scores in Canadian mathematics education.