From: Rosalie Wyonch

To: The Hon. Ministers of Education

Date: December 16, 2016

Re: **PISA RESULTS – GOOD NEWS FOR IMMIGRANTS, BAD NEWS FOR EDUCATION**
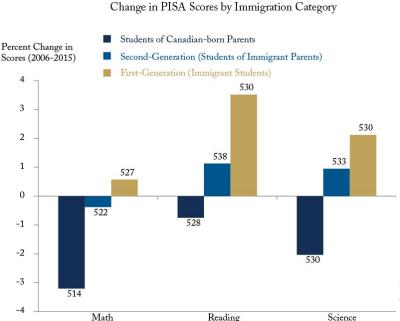

Last week, results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) were released, illustrating that Canada's 15-year olds performed among the world's best in science, reading and math. The results are something to be proud of; Canada boasts high levels of performance relative to other countries, ranking in the top 5 of OECD countries for all three categories, while also achieving high levels of equality in educational outcomes with respect to gender, immigration, and socio-economic status.

However, an inspection of the data shows some troubling trends for students that have non-immigrant parents. Since 2006, the results for students with at least 1 Canadian parent have declined in mathematics and science, and remained flat in reading (Figure 1). These students have declined relative to their own performance and that of their international peers. When only this group of students are considered, Canada's rank in mathematics falls to 10th place among OECD countries for 2015 (down from 5th in 2006).

There is more positive news: first-generation Canadians are outperforming their international peers and rank 1st in all categories among OECD countries. First-generation Canadians have improved over time in science and reading, and were unaffected by the broader declines in mathematics scores (Figure 1). The improvement in the performance of immigrant students and the declining performance of Canadian students has resulted in first-generation Canadians outperforming their peers in mathematics and having comparable scores in science and reading.

While the outcome that students' performance doesn't depend on where their parents are from is very positive for society, the underlying trends may be cause for concern. The consistency of average scores and Canada's high international ranking hides the underlying performance dynamics and doesn't illustrate the declining performance of the students that have Canadian-born parents.

Second-generation Canadians (students born in Canada to immigrant parents) outperform their Canadian peers in all metrics and have seen improved performance in science and reading. This outcome is puzzling in some respects, though it does illustrate that both immigrant students and the children of immigrants are becoming increasingly successful. Declining, or stable, scores in mathematics across all categories of students signals a problem for the education of mathematics. In science and reading, second generation Canadians have improved, while students with Canadian-born parents have declined in performance. Since both groups are born and educated in Canada, perhaps the difference is linked to immigration policy and the educational expectations of parents coming through the points-system screen.

The results of the 2015 PISA assessment are excellent: Canada continues to rank highly and has closed the attainment gap between domestic and immigrant students. However, the decline in performance of Canadian students in math (and in science for students with Canadian-born parents) has been consistent over the last decade, and education policymakers should aim to halt and reverse this

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Change in PISA Scores by Immigration Category

Percent Change in Scores (2006-2015)

■ Students of Canadian-born Parents
■ Second-Generation (Students of Immigrant Parents)
■ First-Generation (Immigrant Students)