



Cheaper Alternatives to Preschool



By Judy Arnall

I considered preschool when I had a 4, 3 and 2 year-old at home. I would watch my neighbor send her children off and the space and quiet she got for two hours a day was enviable, but when I looked at the cost of sending 3 children to preschool, it came just short of \$800 per month. I figured that amount could be better saved for tuition at university rather than a few hours of wonderful peace and quiet.

Are preschools absolutely necessary? No! They are a “nice to have” change for your child, but are not necessary for building social and active learning skills. Your child can do just as much at home as the average child at preschool and excel in arts, sports, friends and academics when they get to school. The key is in you as facilitator, and your home as the environment, and your willingness to endure a wee bit of mess. In fact, research supports that a child that has a huge hand in their own creative endeavors, builds more brain connections than a child that has to be told what to do. There are also studies that show that the more years of institutional education a child has, the less likely they will go on to post-secondary education. Burn-out is the reason. In addition, children most need "serve and return interactions" with an adult (not a peer)

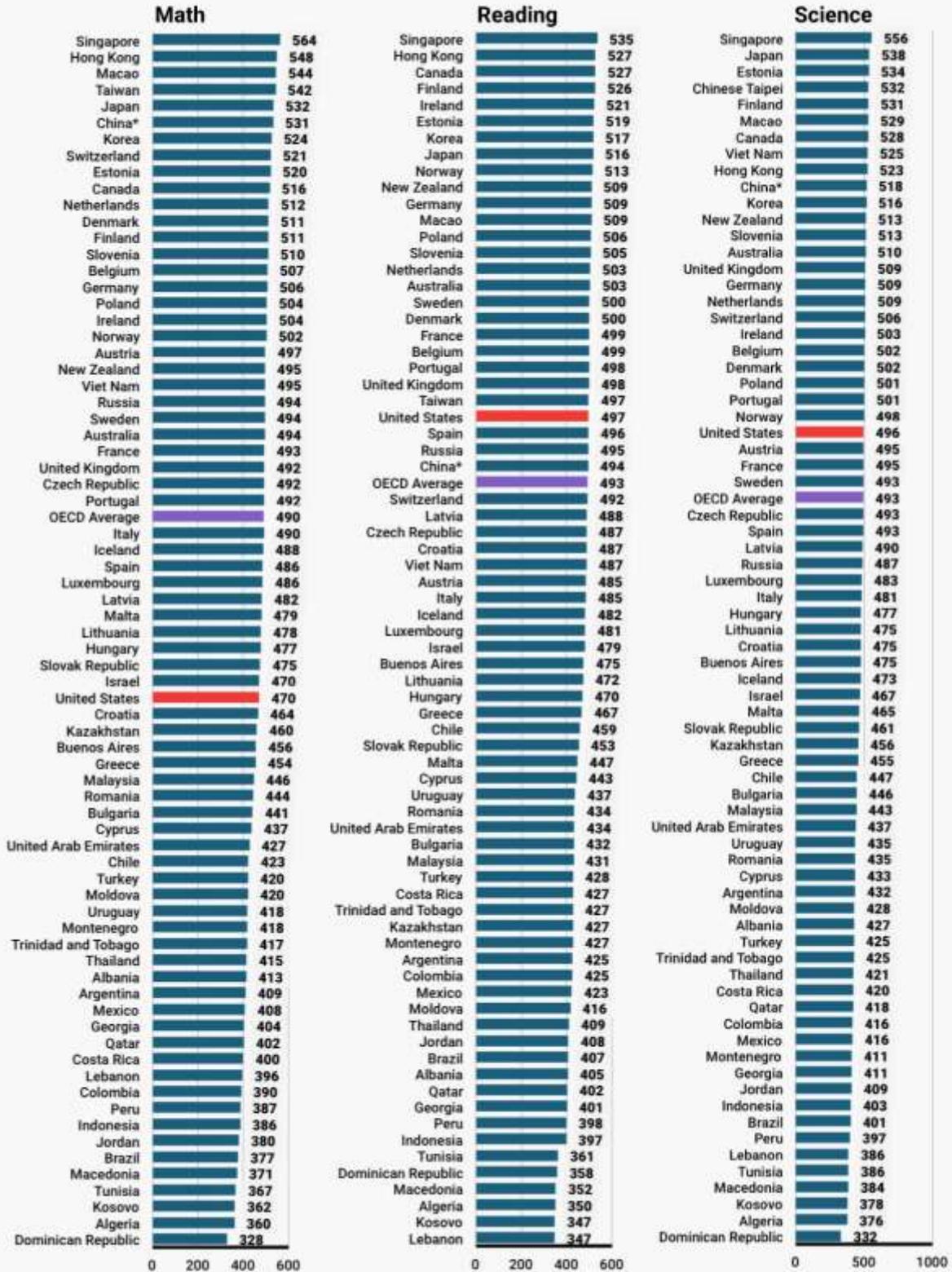
in the early years to develop their brain connections and they are more likely to get that in a one-on-one home environment with a single caregiver, than in a peer-based institution.

If you can't afford the cost of preschool, or choose not to feed into the parental peer-pressure of signing your child up, here are some alternatives that will foster your child's social, cognitive and emotional development just as much. Remember that your child needs you, a few toys and unstructured play the most! Not peers, not worksheets, and not early school.

- Have a sand/rice/lentil table.
- Set up painting twice a week - all you need is newspaper, paper, paints, brushes and lots of patience.
- Save the funds you would have spent on preschool to buy a season's pass to the zoo, science centre and museums. Look at every public place as an opportunity for a field trip.
- Set up water play in the sink or backyard pool.
- Have play dates in your home, in the other parent's home or meeting at an indoor play-place – you control length, company and activities.
- Have as many toys on hand as possible, but rotate them often, so every week is a new bucket of theme toys or old favorites.
- Have a building block station with wooden blocks, Legos, K'nex or Meccano pieces.
- Assemble a dress-up tickle trunk with hats, shoes, belts and shirts obtained from the local goodwill store
- Leave out books and puzzles and read with your child often.
- Set up a play dough table with cutters, rollers, pans, etc.

Half of Canada's parents do not send their child to preschool and Canada's 15 year-old students are still in the top 10 of the world's PISA education results according the OECD. You got this!

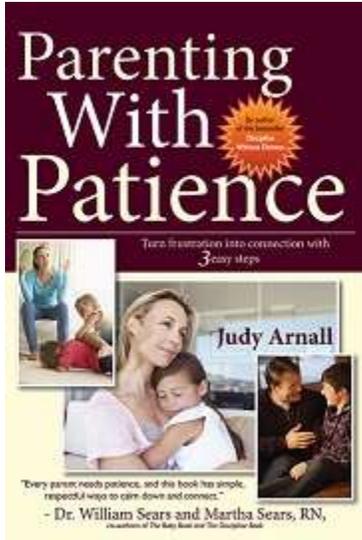
2015 PISA AVERAGE SCORES



SOURCE: OECD. *China is represented by the provinces of Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Guangdong

BUSINESS INSIDER

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning parenting and teacher conference speaker, and trainer, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling book, *Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery* and the new *Parenting with Patience: Turn frustration into connection with 3 easy steps*



www.professionalparenting.ca, jarnall@shaw.ca, 403-714-6766

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