

Third-Grade Reading Skills

DEFINITION

Third-grade reading skills is the percentage of third-grade students who met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* test.

SIGNIFICANCE

Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade, when children begin to shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Students who do not successfully reach this milestone struggle in the later grades and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers.¹

Interventions for students who struggle with reading are more successful when implemented before third grade and when they are culturally relevant.² When intervention is delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade-level peers.^{3,4}

Literacy begins long before children encounter school instruction in writing and reading. Physical and social-emotional health, family supports, literacy-rich home environments (including telling stories) and parents who provide early cognitive development activities contribute to literacy development, reading achievement, and success in school.^{5,6}

High-quality preschool and pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs can boost language and literacy skills and have the greatest impact on children living in or near poverty.⁷ Programs targeting the development of social-emotional and behavioral skills improve children's school readiness and academic achievement. Children who participate in high-quality Pre-K programs score higher on future reading and math assessments, are more likely to become proficient readers in the primary grades, and have higher graduation rates.^{8,9}

Policymakers can increase third-grade reading proficiency by increasing access to high-quality child care, Pre-K, and Head Start; providing parents with supports to create enriched language and literacy opportunities beginning at birth; expanding access to high-quality summer learning programs; and addressing chronic early absence.^{10,11}

| 4th-Grade NAEP Reading Proficiency | | |
|------------------------------------|------|------|
| | 2009 | 2019 |
| RI | 36% | 34% |
| US | 32% | 35% |
| National Rank* | 24th | |
| New England Rank** | 6th | |

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

The *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* measures proficiency nationally and across states every other year for grades 4 and 8.



Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the RICAS English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2019

| SUBGROUP | |
|--|-----|
| Male Students | 42% |
| Female Students | 54% |
| Multilingual Learners/English Learners | 20% |
| Non-English Learners | 52% |
| Students With Disabilities | 14% |
| Students Without Disabilities | 55% |
| Low-Income Students | 32% |
| Higher-Income Students | 64% |
| White Students | 57% |
| Asian Students | 58% |
| Black Students | 33% |
| Hispanic Students | 33% |
| Native American Students | 23% |
| Homeless Students | 25% |
| Non-Homeless Students | 48% |
| ALL STUDENTS | 48% |

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2018. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

- ◆ In 2019, 48% of Rhode Island third graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, English language arts assessment.¹²
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 32% of low-income third graders met expectations in English language arts, compared with 64% of higher-income third graders. There were also large achievement gaps by race and ethnicity as well as by Multilingual Learner/English Learner and disability status. For the first time in Rhode Island, data on reading proficiency is available for students experiencing homelessness. In 2019, 25% of third graders who were identified as homeless met expectations in English language arts, compared to 48% of third graders who were not identified as homeless.¹³
- ◆ In the U.S., 75% of teachers working with early readers do not use research-based methods to teach reading.¹⁴ Evidence-based instructional techniques can help children with reading disabilities acquire proficiency in reading.

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Table 47.

Third-Grade Reading Skills, Rhode Island, 2018-2019

| SCHOOL DISTRICT | # OF THIRD GRADERS TESTED 2019 | % MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2018 | % MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2019 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Barrington | 224 | 73% | 73% |
| Bristol Warren | 241 | 60% | 61% |
| Burrillville | 156 | 32% | 39% |
| Central Falls | 200 | 12% | 26% |
| Chariho | 193 | 59% | 75% |
| Coventry | 317 | 52% | 64% |
| Cranston | 701 | 45% | 55% |
| Cumberland | 313 | 51% | 65% |
| East Greenwich | 177 | 67% | 73% |
| East Providence | 383 | 42% | 55% |
| Exeter-West Greenwich | 121 | 65% | 55% |
| Foster | 43 | 35% | 44% |
| Glocester | 91 | 62% | 71% |
| Jamestown | 44 | 63% | 82% |
| Johnston | 221 | 40% | 44% |
| Lincoln | 243 | 55% | 67% |
| Little Compton | 24 | 64% | 58% |
| Middletown | 160 | 37% | 46% |
| Narragansett | 77 | 64% | 64% |
| New Shoreham | 11 | * | 73% |
| Newport | 161 | 26% | 27% |
| North Kingstown | 246 | 56% | 63% |
| North Providence | 243 | 33% | 45% |
| North Smithfield | 105 | 71% | 70% |
| Pawtucket | 676 | 30% | 37% |
| Portsmouth | 154 | 61% | 55% |
| Providence | 1,714 | 19% | 26% |
| Scituate | 82 | 48% | 70% |
| Smithfield | 173 | 59% | 62% |
| South Kingstown | 204 | 48% | 67% |
| Tiverton | 127 | 53% | 63% |
| Warwick | 622 | 41% | 51% |
| West Warwick | 277 | 31% | 40% |
| Westerly | 184 | 53% | 59% |
| Woonsocket | 477 | 17% | 18% |
| Charter Schools | 795 | 48% | 53% |
| Four Core Cities | 3,067 | 21% | 27% |
| Remainder of State | 6,320 | 49% | 57% |
| Rhode Island | 10,182 | 40% | 48% |

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2019.

Due to the adoption of a new assessment tool by RIDE in 2018, Third-Grade Reading Skills cannot be compared with Factbooks prior to 2018.

% meeting expectations are the third-grade students who met or exceeded expectations for their grade on the English language arts section of the *RICAS*. Only students who actually took the test are counted in the denominator for the district and school proficiency rates. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may participate in alternate assessments instead. Multilingual Learners/English Learners in the U.S. less than one year are exempt from the English language arts assessment.

In Rhode Island, 99% of students were tested. Response rates vary by district.

2019 *RICAS* data for independent charter schools include Achievement First Rhode Island, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, The Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy and SouthSide Charter School. Charter schools included in total differ by year, depending on the schools serving that grade level on the year of the test. Charter schools are not included in the four core cities and remainder of state calculations.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Data is not reported for The Rhode Island School for the Deaf because the number of students tested was less than 10. These students are still counted in the state totals.

See Methodology Section for more information.

References

¹³ Hernandez, D. J. (2012). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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