

# Fourth-Grade Reading Skills

## DEFINITION

*Fourth-grade reading skills* is the percentage of fourth-grade students who scored at or above the proficiency level for reading in the *New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam* in 2004. The exam measures reading and writing skills. Data from the two reading sub-tests are reported here: *Basic Understanding* focuses on the student's ability to comprehend text and *Interpretation and Analysis* focuses on the student's ability to correctly interpret and analyze text.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Reading skills are critical to a student's success in school and in the workforce. Students who are beyond 4th grade who cannot read are more likely to be absent from school, exhibit behavior problems, have low levels of self-confidence, perform poorly in school and drop-out of school before graduation. Parent education, language proficiency, family structure and the community's socioeconomic status are strong predictors of student achievement in reading.<sup>1,2</sup>

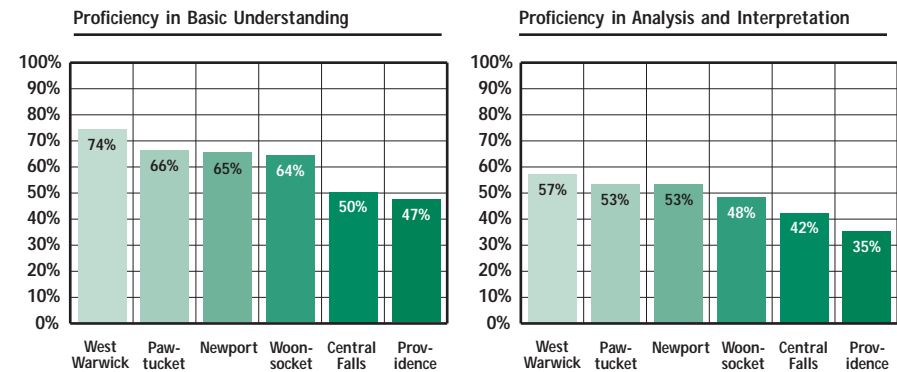
Across the U.S., schools with high poverty rates have achieved high performance by emphasizing best practices such as standards for curriculum design and accountability; parent involvement; extra teaching time for the "basics" of reading and math; and immediate and intensive support for

low-achieving students.<sup>3</sup>

Literacy begins long before children encounter formal school instruction in writing and reading. Reading to young children at home, allowing the child to read out loud and encouraging conversation correlate with advanced literacy development and reading achievement.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Participation in high-quality pre-schools can also boost language and literacy skills by helping children learn, think, and talk about new areas of knowledge; by integrating reading, letters, sounds and storytelling into everyday activities; and by offering opportunities to play in ways that build awareness of the sounds and structure of language.<sup>7</sup>

When students continue to have difficulty reading beyond third grade, they can face tremendous difficulty catching up. Older students can learn to read when they attend schools that identify reading difficulties early, intervene quickly to teach the foundation skills students have missed, address special needs and provide many opportunities to practice reading with meaningful, age-appropriate books. Teaching older students with reading difficulties requires that teachers be well prepared and supported and that students receive intensive instruction, time, and incentives to overcome reading and language challenges.<sup>8</sup>

## Rhode Island Public School 4th Grade Reading Proficiency, Core Cities, 2003-2004



Source: RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam* at Grade 4, 2003-2004 school year.

◆ In 2004, 73% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency in *Basic Understanding* and 62% scored at or above proficiency in *Analysis and Interpretation*. All of Rhode Island's core cities had reading proficiency levels below the state rates except West Warwick which exceeded the state rate for Basic Understanding by one percentage point.<sup>9</sup>

◆ Before children can learn to read, they need to learn that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes, and that there is a relationship between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language. Effective early reading instruction includes activities that teach children to notice, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken language as well as direct teaching of letter-sound relationships.<sup>10</sup>

◆ Repeated and monitored oral reading improves children's ability to recognize words automatically and understand what they read. Improving children's vocabulary helps develop reading skills. Children have a much more difficult time reading words that are not already part of their oral vocabulary.<sup>11</sup>

◆ Teaching specific reading comprehension strategies helps children improve their understanding of what they read and their ability to remember and communicate with others what they read.<sup>12</sup>

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Table 35.

**Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency, Rhode Island, 2003-2004**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	COMMUNITY CONTEXT			# OF ELIGIBLE 4TH GRADE TEST TAKERS	% OF 4TH GRADE STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING STANDARDS FOR BASIC UNDERSTANDING	% OF 4TH GRADE STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING STANDARDS FOR ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION
	% ADULTS COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL	% CHILDREN IN POVERTY	% LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY			
Barrington	92%	2%	<1%	279	93%	85%
Bristol-Warren	NA	8%	3%	267	80%	72%
Burrillville	80%	5%	<1%	170	80%	69%
Central Falls	49%	36%	28%	274	50%	42%
Chariho	NA	4%	<1%	287	83%	69%
Coventry	83%	6%	<1%	462	84%	69%
Cranston	79%	8%	4%	851	85%	75%
Cumberland	81%	3%	2%	439	84%	73%
East Greenwich	93%	4%	1%	215	91%	84%
East Providence	71%	9%	4%	472	76%	63%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	NA	4%	<1%	160	84%	61%
Foster	88%	6%	0%	70	76%	69%
Foster-Glocester	NA	4%	0%	0	NA	NA
Glocester	87%	8%	0%	141	83%	77%
Jamestown	93%	2%	2%	56	80%	75%
Johnston	78%	9%	1%	259	75%	67%
Lincoln	82%	6%	1%	275	81%	72%
Little Compton	91%	1%	0%	38	87%	68%
Middletown	91%	8%	2%	204	79%	69%
Narragansett	91%	7%	1%	142	85%	80%
New Shoreham	95%	8%	4%	5	100%	100%
Newport	87%	22%	4%	196	65%	53%
North Kingstown	92%	7%	1%	359	87%	83%
North Providence	77%	9%	2%	240	80%	65%
North Smithfield	82%	2%	<1%	144	81%	65%
Pawtucket	66%	21%	9%	815	66%	53%
Portsmouth	91%	3%	0%	254	84%	75%
Providence	66%	36%	18%	2,272	47%	35%
Scituate	87%	4%	<1%	137	88%	81%
Smithfield	85%	4%	<1%	222	89%	81%
South Kingstown	91%	4%	1%	328	85%	81%
Tiverton	80%	3%	0%	161	76%	62%
Warwick	85%	7%	1%	879	82%	73%
West Warwick	76%	15%	2%	324	74%	57%
Westerly	82%	7%	2%	288	80%	71%
Woonsocket	64%	27%	4%	540	64%	48%
Charter Schools	NA	NA	10%	76	72%	58%
Core Cities	NA	30%	14%	4,421	56%	43%
Remainder of State	NA	6%	1%	7,804	83%	73%
Rhode Island	78%	15%	6%	12,301	73%	62%

## Source of Data for Table/Methodology

% Children in Poverty is from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Small Area Income and Population Estimates, Children Ages 5-17, 2002. % of Adults Completing High School or higher is from Census 2000 and consequently cannot be given for regional districts for which census data does not exist. As such these districts are marked NA. All other data are from the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003-2004 school year.

All students eligible to take the test, whether or not they actually took the test, are counted in the district's or school's proficiency rate. All enrolled students are eligible unless their IEP specifically exempts them or unless they are beginning English Language Learners.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

Independent charter schools reported for this indicator are the Compass School, CVS Highlander Charter School, International Charter School and Paul Cuffee Charter School.

## References for Indicator

<sup>1,4</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2003). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>2,5,6</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *The condition of education 2003*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<sup>3</sup> Jerald, C. (2001). *Dispelling the myth revisited: Preliminary findings from a nationwide analysis of "high-flying" schools*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

<sup>7</sup> Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

<sup>8</sup> Moats, L.C. (2001). When older kids can't read. *Educational Leadership*, 58(6).

<sup>9</sup> Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 school years.

<sup>10,11,12</sup> The Partnership for Reading. (2003, 2nd Edition). *Put reading first: The research building blocks of reading instruction (Kindergarten through grade 3)*. Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs.