

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 2003. The exam is made up of two parts: *Basic Understanding* focuses on the student's ability to comprehend and understand text, and *Interpretation and Analysis* focuses on the student's ability to correctly interpret and analyze text.

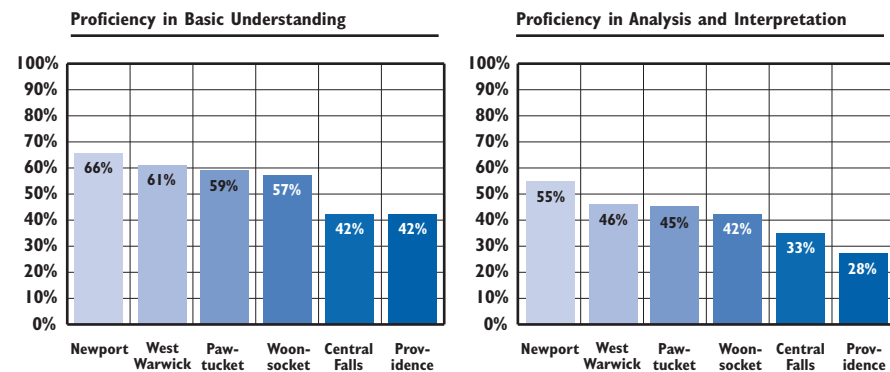
SIGNIFICANCE

Reading skills are critical to a student's success in school and in the workforce. Students who cannot read are more likely to be absent from school, exhibit behavior problems, have low levels of self-confidence, and perform poorly in school. Parent education, language proficiency, family structure, and the community's socioeconomic status are strong predictors of student achievement in reading.^{1,2} 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.³

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, correlates with advanced literacy development and reading achievement.^{4,5,6} 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.⁷

Out-of-school activities are important predictors of reading achievement. Children who report that they regularly read for fun on their own time, visit the library and have parents who are involved in school activities tend to have higher reading proficiency.⁸

Rhode Island Public School 4th Grade Reading Proficiency, Core Cities, 2002-2003



Source: RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam at Grade 4, 2002-2003 school year.

- ◆ In 2003, 70% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency in *Basic Understanding* and 57% scored at or above proficiency in *Analysis and Interpretation*. All of Rhode Island's core cities had reading proficiency levels below the state rates.⁹
- ◆ Between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, *Basic Understanding* proficiency scores declined in all of the core cities. The *Analysis and Interpretation* proficiency scores declined or remained steady in four of the core cities but improved in Newport and Central Falls (53% to 55% and 28% to 33% respectively).¹⁰

Promoting Reading Achievement

- ◆ The Reading First Initiative is a new federal program aimed at ensuring that all students are reading at or above grade level by third grade. The initiative, part of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, helps states and districts implement reading programs for children and provides professional development for teachers regarding scientifically-based instruction and in the identification of children at risk of reading disabilities.
- ◆ Reading First targets services to districts with the highest numbers of students in kindergarten through third grade reading below grade level as well as schools with the highest number of low-income children.^{11,12}

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Table 31.

Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency, Rhode Island, 2003

SCHOOL DISTRICT	COMMUNITY CONTEXT			NUMBER OF 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%	4%	<1%	295	91%	84%
Bistol-Warren	NA	12%	4%	267	72%	62%
Burrillville	80%	5%	<1%	193	70%	59%
Central Falls	49%	37%	30%	320	42%	33%
Chariho	NA	6%	<1%	289	89%	79%
Coventry	83%	8%	<1%	426	82%	68%
Cranston	79%	8%	4%	872	80%	70%
Cumberland	81%	3%	2%	396	86%	72%
East Greenwich	93%	5%	1%	203	91%	84%
East Providence	71%	9%	5%	474	70%	55%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	NA	5%	<1%	166	80%	66%
Foster	88%	6%	0%	70	93%	87%
Foster-Glocester	NA	4%	0%	NA*	NA	NA
Glocester	87%	8%	0%	136	91%	75%
Jamestown	93%	3%	2%	70	91%	80%
Johnston	78%	9%	1%	270	76%	56%
Lincoln	82%	6%	1%	284	80%	66%
Little Compton	91%	1%	0%	31	94%	77%
Middletown	91%	9%	2%	236	78%	68%
Narragansett	91%	10%	1%	124	75%	74%
New Shoreham	95%	11%	2%	NA*	NA	NA
Newport	87%	24%	4%	253	66%	55%
North Kingstown	92%	11%	1%	392	89%	79%
North Providence	77%	9%	2%	257	79%	63%
North Smithfield	82%	2%	0%	146	82%	71%
Pawtucket	66%	21%	12%	842	59%	45%
Portsmouth	91%	3%	<1%	212	91%	83%
Providence	66%	37%	19%	2,336	42%	28%
Scituate	87%	4%	0%	158	85%	78%
Smithfield	85%	4%	<1%	201	84%	76%
South Kingstown	91%	6%	1%	317	86%	77%
Tiverton	80%	3%	0%	146	73%	65%
Warwick	85%	8%	1%	868	82%	68%
West Warwick	76%	18%	2%	297	61%	46%
Westerly	82%	11%	2%	282	83%	71%
Woonsocket	64%	27%	6%	529	57%	42%
Charter Schools	NA	NA	10%	54	52%	48%
State Run Schools	NA	NA	8%	5	0%	0%
Core Cities	NA	30%	15%	4,577	NA	NA
Remainder of State	NA	7%	2%	7,781	82%	70%
Rhode Island	78%	15%	6%	12,417	70%	57%

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, 1999. % of adults completing high school or higher is from Census 2000. All other data are from the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003 school year.

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

NA*: Community has a regional school.

See Methodology, pg 133.

References for Indicator

^{1,4,12} *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*. (2003). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

^{2,6} *The Condition of Education 2003*. (July 2003). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

³ Jerald, C. (2001). *Dispelling the Myth Revisited: Preliminary Findings From a Nationwide Analysis of "High-Flying" Schools*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

⁵ *The Condition of Education 2003*. (2003). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

⁷ Dickinson, D. and Tabors, P. (2001). *Beginning Literacy With Language: Young Children Learning at Home and School*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

⁸ *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth: 2002*. (2003) Washington, DC: U.S. Child Trends Inc., Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

^{9,10} Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years.

¹¹ *Guidance for the Early Reading First Program*. (March 2003). Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.

¹² Kauerz, K. (April 2002). *No Child Left Behind Policy Brief: Literacy*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.