

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 2002. 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

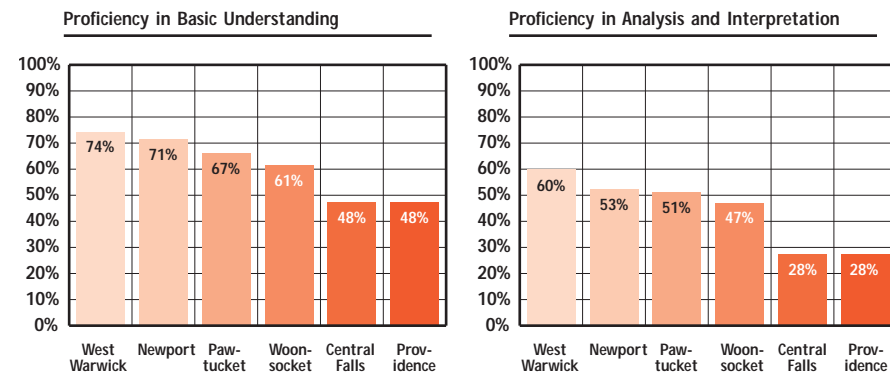
Reading skills are critical to a student's success in school and in the workforce. Students who cannot read are more likely to be absent from school, exhibit behavior problems, have low levels of self-confidence, and perform poorly in school. Parent education, language proficiency, family structure, and the community's socioeconomic status are strong predictors of student achievement in reading.^{1,2} In the U.S., Hispanic children face the most barriers to reading proficiency because they are more likely to be poor, less likely to attend pre-school, and more likely to have parents that have not finished high school.³ 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.⁴

Literacy begins long before children encounter formal school instruction in writing and reading. Reading to young children at home and encouraging conversation and print awareness make a difference in subsequent reading achievement.^{5,6,7} 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.⁸

For school-age children, out-of-school activities are important predictors of reading achievement. Children who report that they regularly read for fun on their own time, children who regularly discuss their reading with family and friends, and children who watch fewer hours of television consistently outperform their peers in reading proficiency.^{9,10}

Rhode Island Public School 4th Grade Reading Proficiency, Core Cities, 2001-2002



Source: RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam at Grade 4, 2001-2002 school year.

◆ In 2002, 74% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency in *Basic Understanding* and 60% scored at or above proficiency in *Analysis and Interpretation*. Five of Rhode Island's core cities had reading proficiency levels below the state rates; one, West Warwick, matched the overall state proficiency level.¹¹

◆ Between 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, each of the six core cities showed improvements in reading proficiency scores.

Reading First

◆ 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.^{13,14}

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Table 31.

Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency, Rhode Island, 2002

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%	259	92%	84%
Bistol-Warren	NA	12%	4%	301	78%	63%
Burrillville	80%	5%	<1%	237	77%	66%
Central Falls	49%	37%	30%	310	48%	28%
Charlho	NA	6%	<1%	287	86%	74%
Coventry	83%	8%	<1%	441	79%	71%
Cranston	79%	8%	4%	926	84%	78%
Cumberland	81%	3%	3%	434	85%	75%
East Greenwich	93%	5%	1%	200	90%	82%
East Providence	71%	9%	5%	514	76%	62%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	NA	5%	1%	139	88%	75%
Foster	88%	6%	0%	78	95%	77%
Foster-Glocester	NA	4%	0%	NA*	NA	NA
Glocester	87%	8%	0%	129	87%	81%
Jamestown	93%	3%	<1%	75	88%	79%
Johnston	78%	9%	2%	271	84%	70%
Lincoln	82%	6%	1%	260	82%	72%
Little Compton	91%	1%	0%	36	92%	78%
Middletown	91%	9%	1%	208	88%	77%
Narragansett	91%	10%	<1%	123	89%	85%
New Shoreham	95%	11%	2%	12	67%	75%
Newport	87%	24%	3%	227	71%	53%
North Kingstown	92%	11%	1%	348	89%	80%
North Providence	77%	9%	3%	285	78%	63%
North Smithfield	82%	2%	<1%	163	88%	75%
Pawtucket	66%	21%	12%	783	67%	51%
Portsmouth	91%	3%	0%	224	88%	79%
Providence	66%	37%	23%	2,312	48%	28%
Scituate	87%	4%	0%	145	90%	83%
Smithfield	85%	4%	0%	216	88%	80%
South Kingstown	91%	6%	1%	339	85%	81%
Tiverton	80%	3%	<1%	202	79%	69%
Warwick	85%	8%	1%	944	81%	67%
West Warwick	76%	18%	2%	318	74%	60%
Westerly	82%	11%	2%	252	81%	70%
Woonsocket	64%	27%	6%	552	61%	47%
Core Cities	NA	30%	17%	4,502	NA	NA
Remainder of State	NA	7%	2%	8,048	NA	NA
Rhode Island	78%	15%	7%	12550	74%	60%

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, 2001-2002 school year.

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

*NA: Community has a regional school.

See Methodology page 125.

References for Indicator

- ¹⁵ *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.
- ²⁹ Donahue, P. et al. *The Nation's Report Card: Fourth Grade Reading 2000* (April 2001). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- ³ Fletcher, M.A., "Latinos at the Back of the Class" in *Washington Post* (December 1998), based on a report by the National Council of La Raza.
- ⁴ Jerald, C. (2001). *Dispelling the Myth Revisited: Preliminary Findings From a Nationwide Analysis of "High-Flying" Schools* Washington, DC: The Education Trust.
- ⁶ *The Condition of Education 2002* (2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- ⁷ *Developing and Supporting Literacy-Rich Environments for Children* (Issue Brief)(2001). Washington, DC: National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices.
- ⁸ Dickinson, D. and Tabors, P. (2001). *Beginning Literacy with Language: Young Children Learning at Home and School*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- ¹⁰ *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth: 2001*. Washington, DC: U.S. Child Trends Inc., Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.
- ^{11,12} Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2001 and 2002.
- ¹³ Kauerz, K. (April 2002). *No Child Left Behind Policy Brief: Literacy*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
- ¹⁴ No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference: www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/reference.html. (February 2003).