

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 early. When intervention is delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade level peers. Successful reading supports are culturally relevant, as well as fun.^{2,3,4}

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 reading aloud) and parents who provide early cognitive development activities (including speaking to young children frequently) contribute to literacy development, reading achievement, and success in school.^{5,6}

High-quality preschool and Pre-K programs can boost language and literacy skills and have the greatest impact on children living in low-income families.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		
	2011	2022
RI	35%	34%
US	32%	32%
National Rank*	14th	
New England Rank**	4th	

*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, 2022

SUBGROUP	
Female Students	39%
Male Students	34%
Multilingual Learners/English Learners	10%
Non-English Learners	41%
Students Receiving Special Education Services	10%
Students Not Receiving Special Education Services	42%
Low-Income Students	20%
Higher-Income Students	51%
Asian Students ⁺	52%
Black Students	22%
Hispanic Students	19%
Native American Students	12%
White Students	48%
Homeless Students	10%
Students in Foster Care	17%
ALL STUDENTS	37%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2021-2022. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program. ⁺Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ In Rhode Island in 2022, 37% of third graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, English language arts assessment. Twenty percent of low-income third graders met expectations, compared with 51% of higher-income third graders. There were also large disparities by race and ethnicity as well as by language status and disability status. Ten percent of third graders who were identified as homeless met expectations in English language arts, compared to 37% of third graders who were not identified as homeless.¹²

◆ In 2022, 17% of third graders who were in foster care met expectations in English language arts compared to 37% of students who were not in foster care.¹³

◆ In the U.S., 75% of teachers working with early readers used some methods not backed by research to teach reading. Evidence-based instructional techniques can help children acquire proficiency in reading.¹⁴



COVID-19 and Grade-Level Reading

◆ School closures and the combination of distance learning and hybrid models resulted in lost instruction time, especially among low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and Black and Latino students.^{15,16,17}

◆ Assessments and early-warning systems can help identify students most at risk for learning loss.¹⁸

◆ *The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)* of 2021 provided funding to states and school districts to reopen schools safely, maximize in-person instruction, and address the impact of the pandemic on students, families, and educators. At least 20% of funds must be for evidence-based interventions that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Students of Color, students from low-income families, students with disabilities, Multilingual Learners, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care.¹⁹

◆ It is critical for students to continue to be instructed in grade level content that is scaffolded with supports. Using materials below grade level can reinforce low expectations and exacerbate disparities in grade level reading.²⁰

Table 46.

Third-Grade Reading Skills, Rhode Island, 2021 & 2022

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF THIRD GRADERS TESTED 2022	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2021	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2022
Barrington	236	69%	69%
Bristol Warren	214	58%	49%
Burrillville	148	30%	30%
Central Falls	153	14%	7%
Chariho	206	59%	54%
Coventry	290	57%	40%
Cranston	731	39%	41%
Cumberland	345	62%	57%
East Greenwich	174	76%	64%
East Providence	325	39%	40%
Exeter-West Greenwich	103	50%	47%
Foster	29	50%	28%
Glocester	94	73%	65%
Jamestown	55	82%	76%
Johnston	232	38%	35%
Lincoln	224	49%	53%
Little Compton	19	78%	74%
Middletown	137	48%	39%
Narragansett	60	71%	75%
New Shoreham	10	45%	40%
Newport	116	27%	21%
North Kingstown	260	65%	57%
North Providence	225	36%	28%
North Smithfield	106	53%	56%
Pawtucket	609	25%	26%
Portsmouth	159	54%	56%
Providence	1,611	19%	16%
Scituate	87	59%	61%
Smithfield	164	67%	53%
South Kingstown	199	60%	49%
Tiverton	107	62%	59%
Warwick	578	46%	38%
West Warwick	251	26%	22%
Westerly	156	42%	46%
Woonsocket	405	16%	19%
Charter Schools	840	36%	29%
Four Core Cities	2,778	19%	18%
Remainder of State	6,043	51%	46%
Rhode Island	9,661	40%	37%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years and are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

The *RICAS* test was not administered in 2020 due to COVID-19.

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 in 2022, 99% of students were tested. Response rates vary by district.

2022 *RICAS* data for independent charter schools include Achievement First Rhode Island, Blackstone Valley Prep, 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, Segue Institute for Learning, 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 remainder of the state and state totals.

See Methodology Section for more information.

(References are on page 189)