

Eighth-Grade Reading Skills

DEFINITION

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

SIGNIFICANCE

Strong reading skills are essential for a student's academic success in high school and college.¹ Reading skills also are a powerful indicator of a student's ability to contribute to, participate in, and succeed in the workforce and the community.² Literacy demands intensify dramatically in grades four through 12, as students are expected to comprehend, synthesize, and analyze increasingly complex texts across academic disciplines. Even after mastering basic literacy skills, adolescents need ongoing support and instruction to develop advanced literacy skills required to succeed in middle and high school, such as applying critical thinking skills and drawing conclusions based on evidence.³

Reading difficulties can persist over time with long-term consequences for youth. Adolescents who struggle to read are more likely to drop out of high school, to have lower wages, and to rely on public assistance than their peers with higher levels of literacy.⁴ These problems are exacerbated for Multilingual Learners/English Learners

and low-income students, who are more likely to have low English literacy skills.⁵

Nationally, there has been limited progress in improving literacy skills among secondary students.⁶ Students who are struggling with reading may have distinct difficulties and require different interventions to address them.⁷ Many supplementary programs are generally insufficient for dealing with the pervasive low levels of adolescent literacy in many schools and communities.⁸

Intensive individualized instruction can help improve adolescent literacy among struggling readers.⁹ Successful adolescent literacy programs include ongoing teacher support and training in the literacy strategy, incorporating culturally relevant literacy instruction in content area classes, explicit reading instruction in reading comprehension, collaborative learning and using student assessments effectively.^{10,11}

8th-Grade NAEP Reading Proficiency		
	2009	2019
RI	28%	35%
US	30%	32%
National Rank*	<i>35th</i>	<i>15th</i>
New England Rank**	<i>6th</i>	<i>6th</i>

*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 four and eight.



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

SUBGROUP	2019
Male Students	28%
Female Students	44%
*Multilingual Learners/English Learners	<5%
Non-English Learners	39%
*Students With Disabilities	<5%
Students Without Disabilities	42%
Low-Income Students	19%
Higher-Income Students	52%
Asian Students+	45%
Black Students	18%
Hispanic Students	18%
Native American Students	10%
White Students	48%
Homeless Students	12%
*Students in Foster Care	<5%
ALL STUDENTS	36%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2019. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program. *Data is reported as <5% when greater than 95% of students do not meet expectations. The RICAS test was not administered in 2020 due to COVID-19.

+ Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ The U.S. Department of Education waived assessments for all states for the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹² School closures and the combination of distance learning and hybrid models are expected to impact academic progress, especially among low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and Black and Latino students.¹³

◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 19% of low-income eighth graders met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, compared with 52% of higher-income eighth graders. There were also large disparities by race and ethnicity as well as by language and disability status. Twelve percent of eighth graders who were identified as homeless met expectations in English language arts, compared to 37% of eighth graders who were not identified as homeless.¹⁴

◆ For the first time in Rhode Island, data on reading proficiency is available for students in foster care. In 2019, less than 5% of eighth graders who were in foster care met expectations in English language arts compared to 36% of students who were not in foster care.¹⁵

Table 48.

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

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# EIGHTH GRADERS TESTED	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS IN 2018	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS IN 2019
Barrington	282	70%	80%
Bristol Warren	232	39%	48%
Burrillville	174	22%	29%
Central Falls	196	<5%	6%
Chariho	221	50%	60%
Coventry	369	41%	51%
Cranston	826	27%	37%
Cumberland	368	53%	60%
East Greenwich	222	62%	69%
East Providence	399	24%	23%
Exeter-West Greenwich	120	39%	74%
Foster-Glocester	160	54%	46%
Jamestown	50	63%	54%
Johnston	244	17%	43%
Lincoln	245	26%	30%
Little Compton	30	55%	37%
Middletown	147	28%	35%
Narragansett	103	46%	54%
Newport	138	22%	24%
North Kingstown	320	60%	54%
North Providence	293	20%	47%
North Smithfield	113	55%	61%
Pawtucket	726	10%	19%
Portsmouth	183	45%	62%
Providence	1,635	8%	15%
Scituate	114	19%	50%
Smithfield	206	51%	60%
South Kingstown	241	45%	61%
Tiverton	130	25%	37%
Warwick	633	25%	32%
West Warwick	233	29%	27%
Westerly	204	28%	39%
Woonsocket	403	10%	12%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	442	23%	34%
<i>Urban Collaborative</i>	73	5%	<5%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	2,960	10%	15%
<i>Remainder of State</i>	7,012	35%	46%
<i>Rhode Island</i>	10,487	28%	36%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

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

% meeting expectations are the eighth-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. Multilingual Learners/English Learners in the U.S. for less than one year are exempt from the English language arts assessment.

2019 *RICAS* data for independent charter schools include: Beacon Charter School for the Arts, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, The Learning Community, Segue Institute for Learning, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. Charter schools included in total differ by year, depending on the schools serving that grade level on the year of the test. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program. Four core cities and remainder of state calculations do not include charter schools or UCAP.

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

Data is not reported for New Shoreham or 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

^{1,6,10} Hervey, S. (2013). *Adolescent readers in middle school*. New York, NY: Generation Ready.

²⁴ Salinger, T. (2011). *Addressing the "crisis" in adolescent literacy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Smaller Learning Communities Program.

³ Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy. (2010). *Time to act: An agenda for advancing adolescent literacy for college and career success*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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