

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 before third grade and when they are culturally relevant.² When intervention is delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade-level peers.^{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 parents who provide early cognitive development activities contribute to literacy development, reading achievement, and success in school.^{5,6}

High-quality preschool and pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs can boost language and literacy skills and have the greatest impact on children living in or near poverty.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		
	2009	2019
RI	36%	35%
US	32%	34%
National Rank*	24th	
New England Rank**	6th	

*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, 2019

SUBGROUP	
Female Students	54%
Male Students	42%
Multilingual Learners/English Learners	20%
Non-English Learners	52%
Students With Disabilities	14%
Students Without Disabilities	55%
Low-Income Students	32%
Higher-Income Students	64%
Asian Students+	58%
Black Students	33%
Hispanic Students	33%
Native American Students	23%
White Students	57%
Homeless Students	25%
Students in Foster Care	25%
ALL STUDENTS	48%

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. 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.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2019, 48% of third graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* English language arts assessment. Thirty-two percent of low-income third graders met expectations, compared with 64% of higher-income third graders. There were also large disparities by race and ethnicity as well as by language status and disability status. Twenty-five percent of third graders who were identified as homeless met expectations in English language arts, compared to 48% of third graders who were not identified as homeless.¹²
- ◆ For the first time in Rhode Island, data on reading proficiency is available for students in foster care. In 2019, 25% of third graders who were in foster care met expectations in English language arts compared to 48% 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.¹⁴ Evidence-based instructional techniques can help children with reading disabilities acquire proficiency in reading.



COVID-19 and Grade-Level Reading

◆ The U.S. Department of Education waived assessments for all states for the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ Lost instruction time caused by school closures, the challenges of distance learning, and the social-emotional stresses of the pandemic are expected to result in significant loss of academic progress, especially among low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and Black and Latino students.¹⁶

◆ Assessments and early-warning systems can help identify students most at risk for learning loss.¹⁷⁸

◆ Evidence-based accelerated strategies that provide additional learning hours, small group instruction, culturally relevant materials, and grade-level content can help students recover from lost learning time.¹⁸

◆ 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.¹⁹

Table 47. Third-Grade Reading Skills, Rhode Island, 2018-2019

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF THIRD GRADERS TESTED 2019	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2018	% MEETING EXPECTATIONS 2019
Barrington	224	73%	73%
Bristol Warren	241	60%	61%
Burrillville	156	32%	39%
Central Falls	200	12%	26%
Chariho	193	59%	75%
Coventry	317	52%	64%
Cranston	701	45%	55%
Cumberland	313	51%	65%
East Greenwich	177	67%	73%
East Providence	383	42%	55%
Exeter-West Greenwich	121	65%	55%
Foster	43	35%	44%
Glocester	91	62%	71%
Jamestown	44	63%	82%
Johnston	221	40%	44%
Lincoln	243	55%	67%
Little Compton	24	64%	58%
Middletown	160	37%	46%
Narragansett	77	64%	64%
New Shoreham	11	*	73%
Newport	161	26%	27%
North Kingstown	246	56%	63%
North Providence	243	33%	45%
North Smithfield	105	71%	70%
Pawtucket	676	30%	37%
Portsmouth	154	61%	55%
Providence	1,714	19%	26%
Scituate	82	48%	70%
Smithfield	173	59%	62%
South Kingstown	204	48%	67%
Tiverton	127	53%	63%
Warwick	622	41%	51%
West Warwick	277	31%	40%
Westerly	184	53%	59%
Woonsocket	477	17%	18%
Charter Schools	795	48%	53%
Four Core Cities	3,067	21%	27%
Remainder of State	6,320	49%	57%
Rhode Island	10,182	40%	48%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

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

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

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. Multilingual Learners/English Learners in the U.S. less than one year are exempt from the English language arts assessment.

In Rhode Island, 99% of students were tested. Response rates vary by district.

2019 *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, 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 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

¹³ Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

(continued on page 187)