

Reading Skills

DEFINITION

Reading skills is the percentage of third- and eighth-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 reach this milestone struggle in later grades and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient peers.¹ When interventions for students who struggle with reading are delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade level peers.² Literacy demands change and intensify quickly in grades four through 12, as students are expected to comprehend, synthesize, and analyze increasingly complex texts and draw conclusions based on evidence.³ Reading skills are also a powerful indicator of a student's ability to contribute to, participate in, and succeed in the workforce and the community.⁴

Literacy begins long before children encounter school instruction in writing and reading. Physical and social-emotional health, family supports, literacy-rich home environments and parents who speak to young children frequently contribute to

literacy development, reading achievement, and academic success.^{5,6}

High-quality preschool and Pre-K programs targeting social-emotional development and behavioral skills can boost language and literacy skills and improve school readiness and academic achievement and have the greatest impact on children in low-income families.⁷ Children who participate score higher on reading and math assessments, are more likely to become proficient readers in primary grades, and have higher graduation rates.^{8,9} Adolescents who struggle to read are more likely to have lower wages and rely on public assistance than their peers with higher levels of literacy, problems which are exacerbated for Multilingual Learners and low-income students.^{10,11}

Policymakers can increase 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 summer learning programs; and addressing chronic absence.^{12,13} Ongoing teacher support and training in literacy strategy, culturally relevant literacy instruction in content area classes, explicit instruction in reading comprehension, using student assessments effectively, and intensive individualized instruction are important components of successful adolescent literacy programs.^{14,15,16}



Third- & Eighth-Grade Students Meeting Expectations on the RICAS English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2023

SUBGROUP	THIRD GRADERS	EIGHTH GRADERS
Female Students	38%	38%
Male Students	36%	27%
Multilingual Learners	10%	<5%
Non-English Learners	42%	37%
Students Receiving Special Education Services	11%	<5%
Students Not Receiving Special Education Services	43%	37%
Low-Income Students	20%	17%
Higher-Income Students	52%	45%
Asian Students+	54%	43%
Black Students	20%	18%
Hispanic Students	21%	18%
Native American Students	9%	12%
White Students	48%	42%
Homeless Students	14%	11%
Students in Foster Care	19%	10%
ALL STUDENTS	37%	32%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2022-2023. 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. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

★ In Rhode Island in 2023, 37% of third graders and 32% of eighth graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, English language arts assessment. Twenty percent of low-income third graders and seventeen percent of low-income eighth graders met expectations, compared with 52% of higher-income third graders and 45% of higher-income eighth graders. There were also large disparities by race and ethnicity as well as by language status and disability status.¹⁷

★ In 2023, 14% percent of third graders and 11% of eighth graders who were identified as homeless met expectations in English language arts. Nineteen percent of third graders and 10% of eighth graders who were in foster care met expectations in English language arts compared to 37% of third graders and 32% of eighth graders who were not in foster care.¹⁸

Table 46. Third- & Eighth-Grade Students Meeting Expectations in Reading, Rhode Island, 2022-2023

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF THIRD GRADERS TESTED	% OF THIRD GRADERS MEETING EXPECTATIONS	# OF EIGHTH GRADERS TESTED	% OF EIGHTH GRADERS MEETING EXPECTATIONS
Barrington	211	65%	263	74%
Bristol Warren	203	54%	208	51%
Burrillville	151	38%	163	35%
Central Falls	172	8%	194	**
Chariho	213	64%	213	38%
Coventry	285	45%	310	32%
Cranston	691	39%	795	31%
Cumberland	328	60%	335	55%
East Greenwich	173	69%	218	72%
East Providence	338	45%	383	25%
Exeter-West Greenwich	104	53%	104	55%
Foster	41	32%	NA	NA
Foster-Glocester	NA	NA	142	39%
Glocester	101	60%	NA	NA
Jamestown	37	78%	40	55%
Johnston	213	32%	283	35%
Lincoln	260	49%	247	51%
Little Compton	18	83%	26	54%
Middletown	141	42%	152	43%
Narragansett	60	72%	75	51%
New Shoreham	13	46%	8	*
Newport	144	15%	131	14%
North Kingstown	267	58%	246	55%
North Providence	259	34%	278	45%
North Smithfield	107	51%	137	61%
Pawtucket	581	24%	631	14%
Portsmouth	141	55%	152	49%
Providence	1,491	19%	1420	15%
Scituate	98	49%	86	43%
Smithfield	167	46%	163	44%
South Kingstown	174	53%	208	47%
Tiverton	125	63%	124	40%
Warwick	559	37%	611	25%
West Warwick	247	29%	263	15%
Westerly	164	38%	191	45%
Woonsocket	443	14%	402	10%
Charter Schools	925	27%	703	29%
Urban Collaborative	NA	NA	71	<5%
Four Core Cities	2,687	19%	2,647	13%
Remainder of State	6,033	46%	6,535	41%
Rhode Island	9,645	37%	9,956	32%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* 2022-2023 school year and are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

Due to the adoption of a new assessment tool by RIDE in 2018, Reading Skills cannot be compared with Factbooks prior to 2018.

% meeting expectations are the 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 2023, 99% of third grade students and 98% of eighth grade students were tested. Response rates vary by district.

2023 *RICAS* data for independent charter schools include Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter School, 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, SouthSide Charter School, 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. Charter schools and UCAP are not included in the four core cities 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)