

# 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

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a milestone for students because it is at this point in their education that they move 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 their proficient peers.<sup>1</sup> When interventions for students who struggle with reading are delayed until after third grade, most children never catch up to their grade level peers.<sup>2</sup> Literacy demands change and intensify quickly in grades four through 12, as students are expected to comprehend, synthesize, and analyze increasingly complex texts across academic disciplines.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5,6</sup>

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 living in low-income families.<sup>7</sup> Children who participate score higher on future reading and math assessments, are more likely to become proficient readers in primary grades and have higher graduation rates.<sup>8,9</sup>

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.<sup>4,10</sup>

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 high-quality summer learning programs; and addressing chronic absence.<sup>11,12</sup> 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.<sup>13-15</sup>



## Students Meeting Expectations on the RICAS English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2025

| SUBGROUP  | THIRD GRADERS | EIGHTH GRADERS |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| Female Students                                   | 39%           | 41%            |
| Male Students                                     | 35%           | 29%            |
| Multilingual Learners                             | 12%           | <5%            |
| Non-English Learners                              | 42%           | 40%            |
| Students Receiving Special Education Services     | 11%           | 5%             |
| Students Not Receiving Special Education Services | 43%           | 41%            |
| Low-Income Students                               | 24%           | 21%            |
| Higher-Income Students                            | 55%           | 53%            |
| American Indian or Alaska Native Students         | 11%           | 16%            |
| Asian Students+                                   | 55%           | 53%            |
| Black Students                                    | 24%           | 19%            |
| Hispanic Students                                 | 23%           | 20%            |
| White Students                                    | 47%           | 46%            |
| Homeless Students                                 | 18%           | 16%            |
| Students in Foster Care                           | 16%           | 17%            |
| <b>ALL STUDENTS</b>                               | <b>37%</b>    | <b>35%</b>     |

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2024-2025. 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 2025, 37% of third graders and 35% of eighth graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* English language arts assessment. Among low-income students, 24% of third graders and 21% of eighth graders met expectations, compared with 55% of higher-income third graders and 53% of higher-income eighth graders. There were also large disparities by race and ethnicity as well as by language status and disability status.<sup>16</sup>

◆ In 2025, 18% percent of third graders and 16% of eighth graders who were identified as experiencing homelessness met expectations in English language arts. Of students in foster care, 16% of third graders and 17% of eighth graders met expectations in English language arts compared to 37% of all third graders and 35% of all eighth graders.<sup>16</sup>

Table 44.

Third- & Eighth-Grade Students Meeting Expectations in Reading, Rhode Island, 2024-2025 School Year

| SCHOOL DISTRICT        | # OF THIRD GRADERS TESTED | % OF THIRD GRADERS MEETING EXPECTATIONS | # OF EIGHTH GRADERS TESTED | % OF EIGHTH GRADERS MEETING EXPECTATIONS |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|
| Barrington             | 245                       | 59%                                     | 262                        | 77%                                      |
| Bristol Warren         | 201                       | 52%                                     | 205                        | 48%                                      |
| Burrillville           | 140                       | 36%                                     | 158                        | 28%                                      |
| Central Falls          | 154                       | 8%                                      | 174                        | 9%                                       |
| Chariho                | 227                       | 52%                                     | 215                        | 46%                                      |
| Coventry               | 315                       | 38%                                     | 331                        | 41%                                      |
| Cranston               | 678                       | 36%                                     | 771                        | 32%                                      |
| Cumberland             | 372                       | 56%                                     | 374                        | 59%                                      |
| East Greenwich         | 191                       | 60%                                     | 207                        | 77%                                      |
| East Providence        | 367                       | 37%                                     | 385                        | 28%                                      |
| Exeter-West Greenwich  | 103                       | 45%                                     | 120                        | 61%                                      |
| Foster                 | 32                        | 28%                                     | *                          | *  |
| Foster-Glocester       | *                         | *                                       | 132                        | 55%                                      |
| Glocester              | 101                       | 54%                                     | *                          | *  |
| Jamestown              | 47                        | 79%                                     | 46                         | 72%                                      |
| Johnston               | 219                       | 26%                                     | 213                        | 44%                                      |
| Lincoln                | 237                       | 51%                                     | 249                        | 37%                                      |
| Little Compton         | 19                        | 74%                                     | 28                         | 79%                                      |
| Middletown             | 146                       | 59%                                     | 151                        | 43%                                      |
| Narragansett           | 56                        | 52%                                     | 76                         | 58%                                      |
| New Shoreham           | 15                        | 27%                                     | 12                         | 58%                                      |
| Newport                | 104                       | 20%                                     | 112                        | 10%                                      |
| North Kingstown        | 258                       | 65%                                     | 267                        | 52%                                      |
| North Providence       | 262                       | 31%                                     | 263                        | 39%                                      |
| North Smithfield       | 127                       | 61%                                     | 119                        | 65%                                      |
| Pawtucket              | 616                       | 25%                                     | 618                        | 18%                                      |
| Portsmouth             | 137                       | 60%                                     | 155                        | 61%                                      |
| Providence             | 1,390                     | 24%                                     | 1,288                      | 16%                                      |
| Scituate               | 88                        | 43%                                     | 89                         | 49%                                      |
| Smithfield             | 183                       | 57%                                     | 180                        | 53%                                      |
| South Kingstown        | 164                       | 62%                                     | 183                        | 49%                                      |
| Tiverton               | 113                       | 58%                                     | 145                        | 49%                                      |
| Warwick                | 570                       | 37%                                     | 566                        | 31%                                      |
| West Warwick           | 309                       | 21%                                     | 250                        | 10%                                      |
| Westerly               | 165                       | 40%                                     | 161                        | 45%                                      |
| Woonsocket             | 414                       | 13%                                     | 339                        | 8%                                       |
| Charter Schools        | 1,082                     | 26%                                     | 882                        | 28%                                      |
| State-Operated Schools | *                         | *                                       | *                          | *  |
| Collaboratives         | *                         | *                                       | 71                         | 10%                                      |
| Five Core Cities       | 2,678                     | 22%                                     | 2,513                      | 14%                                      |
| Remainder of State     | 6,087                     | 45%                                     | 6,313                      | 44%                                      |
| Rhode Island           | 9,850                     | 37%                                     | 9,802                      | 35%                                      |

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) 2024-2025* 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 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 in the U.S. less than one year are exempt from the English language arts assessment.

In Rhode Island in 2025, 99.3% of third grade students and 98.1% of eighth grade students were tested. Response rates vary by district.

\*Data is not reported because the number of students tested was less than 10. These students are still counted in the remainder of state and state totals.

2025 *RICAS* data for independent charter schools include Achievement First Rhode Island and Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Networks, Beacon Charter School, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Highlander Charter School, The Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter, Providence Preparatory Charter, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, SouthSide Charter School, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. State-operated schools include Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Students enrolled in state-operated schools, charter schools, and collaboratives are not counted in totals for the five core cities or for the remainder of state, but they are included in state totals.

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