

A BIG WIN FOR RHODE ISLAND STUDENTS



Rhode Island's Common Core State Standards

In 2013, Rhode Island's on-time high school graduation rate was 81%—comparable to many other states. That same year, more than half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP).

Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. The Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) showed a much lower rate of proficiency than the NECAP—in one instance by as much as 36%. On the national assessment, less than half of 4th and 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in reading and math.

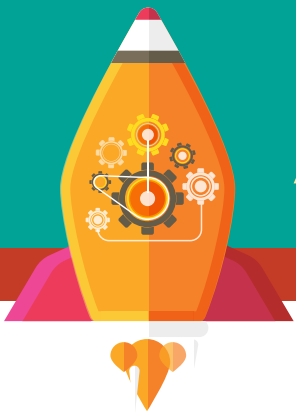
Rhode Island's Proficiency Performance on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and NECAP

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
NAEP	45%	35%	40%	40%
NECAP	63%	71%	57%	74%

Although many students were graduating high school and achieving proficiency scores on the state assessment, they were not prepared with the skills they needed most. In 2013, only 39% of students who took the ACT met college-readiness benchmarks in all areas. Recognizing this discrepancy, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in 2010 in English language arts (ELA) and math to ensure that students were learning the skills most essential for college and careers.

According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the previous state standards were among the worst in the nation, lacking clear priorities on the most essential content. In particular, the math standards were poorly organized and did not adequately develop arithmetic. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the state standards received a D in rigor.

With the adoption of higher standards, Rhode Island is one step closer to helping ensure that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 66% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 43% of adults in state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 23% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Rhode Island have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Rhode Island receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two testing options aligned to the higher

standards: the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Rhode Island, where students participated in the PARCC field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Rhode Island is a governing member of the PARCC consortium. Students in grades 3–8 will take the math and ELA test in spring 2015. High school students will take the PARCC end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, and English Language Arts I and II. These computer-based assessments will accurately measure how well a student is mastering the standards. The assessments include a variety of question types, including performance-based tasks, which require students to apply high-level skills such as critical thinking and analysis and produce longer written essays. In math, questions will require students to not only solve computations, but also to apply formulas, explain their reasoning, and justify their answers.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Rhode Island students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the PARCC tests because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to ensure that students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the sametest?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.



The Common Core State Standards

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Are comparable across states.

Better Assessments

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

PARCC

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- The PARCC assessments will replace the NECAP in English language arts and math in grades 3–8. High school students in Algebra I, Geometry, and English Language Arts I and II will also take the PARCC end-of-course assessments.

4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as teachers use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are also checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify schools in need of extra support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across a district and in the state will receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student learning objectives are one measure on a teacher evaluation. State assessment scores can be used as evidence of student learning, but teachers may also choose from a number of other summative assessments to fulfill this requirement.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no statewide testing requirements for graduation or promotion.

7. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Rhode Island is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.

- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

8. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Rhode Island teachers contributed to the design of the test and reviewed test items and reading passages. In addition, some teachers are playing an important role in providing information about PARCC to their fellow educators and the public through the Educator Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who share best practices and are active leaders in state and local implementation.

9. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate, but paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that do not yet meet the technology requirement or prefer that method.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century workforce.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.parcconline.org
- www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment.aspx
- www.BusinessforCore.org