



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications - (401) 222-8471
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Governor Carcieri Releases Results of First Statewide Science Tests

PROVIDENCE – Governor Donald L. Carcieri today (September 23, 2008) released the results of the first statewide science tests, which were administered last May to all students in grades 4, 8, and 11.

The tests showed that about 1 in 4 Rhode Island students (24%) attained proficiency in science; 36% reached proficiency in grade 4, 18% in grade 8, and 17% in grade 11.

The test was administered simultaneously in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island, as part of the NECAP testing program developed through a partnership of the three states. In New Hampshire, 51% of grade-4 students, 26% of grade-8 students, and 22% of grade-11 students attained proficiency. (Vermont will release its results tomorrow.)

In Rhode Island, significant gaps separated scores in the urban districts from the scores in the rest of the state. In the urban districts, 13% of the grade-4 students, 3% of grade-8 students, and 5% of the grade-11 students attained proficiency.

“Over the past three years, Rhode Island has put in place clear and challenging science standards for all grade levels,” said Governor Carcieri. “The test results released today are our first look at whether classroom instruction is lined up with these standards. Rhode Island has never before had a science assessment, and these results will guide us as we take the necessary steps to align the science curriculum and instruction with our state standards. If you don’t acknowledge the problem, you can’t take it on and solve it – and that’s what we intend to do.”

“With the results of the NECAP science tests as our new benchmark, we can begin to examine some critical questions about science education in Rhode Island,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “We need to determine whether we have enough qualified science teachers and whether they have the necessary training and materials to do their work.”

“Over the past five years, the Board of Regents has focused on bringing high standards to all Rhode Island schools,” said Patrick A. Guida, Esq., Vice-chairman of the Board of Regents. “Now that we have these science scores as our benchmark, we can set the right course of action to improve these scores. It’s a big challenge, but we intend to see improved test scores in the sciences in future years.”

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“As with the high-school mathematics tests, the NECAP science tests show us that many of our students have not had access to a full science curriculum,” said Peter McWalters, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Students can learn once they get access to high-quality instruction and to a complete curriculum, and we will examine science instruction to ensure that teaching is aligned with the statewide science standards.”

Several initiatives are already under way to improve science education in the state, including:

- The Board of Regents has voted to require three years of science and four years of mathematics for graduation from high school.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) has taken a leadership role in providing materials to help districts align their curriculum with the state science standards.
- The state has made investments in curriculum tools (e.g., the Statewide Curriculum) and in technology to be used in various aspects of teacher preparation, including the sciences.
- RIDE has distributed a needs-assessment survey to all science teachers in the state.
- RIDE is assembling a Science Education Leadership Council to address a broad spectrum of issues pertaining to instruction and assessment in the sciences.
- The Center for Excellence in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Education, housed at Rhode Island College, is coordinating curriculum-development initiatives and professional-development opportunities for teachers across the state.
- The Physics First Program, now in its third year of implementation, has been successfully piloted at six high schools.

The NECAP science tests measure student achievement in three science areas: life sciences, physical sciences, and earth & space science. A fourth section of the test focuses on the methods of scientific inquiry. Sample tests and answer sheets for each grade level are posted on the RIDE Web site, at: http://www.ride.ri.gov/Assessment/necap_science.aspx

Details on the test results, including results by school and district, are also posted on the RIDE Web site, at: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Assessment/default.aspx>

Information on the statewide science standards is posted on the RIDE Web site, at: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/gle.aspx>

Detailed test reports for each school and district are posted at: <http://reporting.measuredprogress.org/NECAPpublicRI/>