



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
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## NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications - (401) 222-8471  
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### **Science scores improve in all tested grades, achievement gaps persist**

Rhode Island students achieved gains on the 2010 NECAP Science assessments, improving by 3.6 points compared with the 2009 assessments.

Fourth-graders improved by 3.8 points, 8<sup>th</sup>-graders by 5 points, high-school students (grade 11) by 1.1 point.

Statewide, 28.8 percent of the students tested scored at the proficiency level or higher, including 44.1 percent of the 4<sup>th</sup>-graders, 22.6 percent of the 8<sup>th</sup>-graders, and 20.5 percent of the students in grade 11.

“When you compare this year’s student performance against the results in 2008, we see significant gains. In fact, we have a 5 percentage-point increase for all students. That’s a great accomplishment, and it’s testimony to the hard work of administrators, students, teachers, families, higher education officials, and the business community,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “The most progress was demonstrated among our 4<sup>th</sup>-graders, with an 8-point increase. Both middle schools and high schools had a 4-point increase. While we are trending in the right direction, we still have a lot of work to do. Our levels of performance clearly need to be much higher.

“As part of my multifaceted effort to improve the education system in Rhode Island, particularly in the areas of science and math, the state implemented many changes, including requiring 3 years of science and 4 years of math for high-school graduation, establishing a STEM Center at Rhode Island College, enhancing the use of technology in our educator-preparation programs, and instituting Physics First,” Carcieri continued. “With these initiatives, and a committed Board of Regents and Department of Education, we have set a clear course for us to see better results in student performance in math and science in the years to come.”

The tests, which students took last May in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont, marked the third year of NECAP science assessments. Rhode Island scores have improved at all three grade levels since the initial 2008 assessments, but they remain the lowest of the three NECAP states.

“We are pleased to see these gains, but we have to be more aggressive to meet our goals,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “At the current rate of improvement, it would take many years to get to an acceptable level of proficiency. Although the gains are not big enough statewide, there are some schools that have made substantial progress this year, and I commend these schools for their accomplishments.”

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Four high schools, 13 middle schools, and more than 50 elementary schools improved by 10 points or more compared with the 2009 assessments.

Portsmouth, Cranston, Providence, and the Central Falls districts improved at all three grade levels. The scores for Providence and Central Falls, however, remain well below the state averages. Though seven elementary schools in Providence improved by more than 10 points, well above the state average, six Providence middle schools and nine high schools had proficiency levels below 2 percent.

“There are places making the kinds of gains that we need to see, and that’s encouraging,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Thanks to some of our ongoing initiatives to improve science instruction, we will continue to see improvements. I am concerned, however, that our achievement gaps continue to be wide and that they are growing. I am also concerned that we are not on track to meet our 2012 statewide targets.”

Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and English-language learners scored at least 25 points below the state average in grade 4, at least 17 points below the state average in grade 8, and at least 14 points below the state average in grade 11. With the exception of Hispanic students in grade 11, the gaps widened this year for all four groups at all grade levels, even though scores improved slightly in 2010 for all groups except students with disabilities.

Governor Carcieri released the NECAP results today (September 28) at a news conference in the State House. On hand at the news conference were staff members from three schools that performed especially well on the assessments:

- **The Matunuck School** (South Kingstown), improved by 23 points, to 85 percent of its 4<sup>th</sup>-graders scoring proficient or higher. The school has used data workshops to identify curriculum and instruction gaps and has incorporated literacy into its science instruction.
- **The Nathanael Greene Middle School** (Providence) improved by 11 points, more than doubling the proficiency level of its 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. The school has successfully implemented the unified core-science curriculum of the Providence district, and the Nathanael Greene staff has benefitted from associated professional development for instruction in science.
- **Portsmouth High School** improved by 9 points and had the highest proficiency level (52 percent) among all 11<sup>th</sup>-graders in the state. Portsmouth High is a participant in the Physics First program and has been involved in the RI-TEST program through a National Science Foundation grant.

Among ongoing initiatives to improve science instruction and results in Rhode Island are:

- **Data analysis workshops**, at which more than 150 teachers and school leaders analyzed NECAP data to inform instruction, assessments, and curriculum at their schools;
- **Building a Strong Foundation**, a mathematics-science partnership between the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) and the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, which provides targeted support for school districts to align their mathematics and science curriculum within their system;

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- **Inner Space Center at URI and Smithfield Public Schools**, which uses telepresence technologies to connect to oceanographic exploration projects in real time and to share the excitement of undersea discovery as it happens;
- **Physics First**, a high-school science initiative based on guided-inquiry learning through the physics, chemistry, and biology sequence and with a new atomic and molecular curriculum focus, plus teacher professional development;
- **Educators Ashore Supporting Nautilus Live**, currently underway in Smithfield, which provides educators with an opportunity to become a part of scientific research as it happens and to establish partnerships between classroom teachers and community youth-organization leaders; and
- **RI Technology Enhanced Science Program (RITES)**, through which science educators from high schools and middle schools participate in professional development that focuses on the use of technology-enhanced investigations.

“I am confident that we can continue to advance student achievement in science,” said Commissioner Gist. “We have brilliant students and strong educators, and we will use some of our Race to the Top grant to improve instruction in science. We must hold educators and students to high expectations, but we will also provide them the supports that they need to advance learning for all.”

For a complete report on the 2010 NECAP science scores, visit the RIDE Web site, at: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/Results.aspx>

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