

Frequently Asked Questions about the Rhode Island State Assessments January 2007

What are the state assessments?

The R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) administers state tests each year in grades 3 through 8 and one high-school grade (grade 11), as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). School-performance classifications are determined by the results of these tests.

Elementary-school and middle-school students are tested in October; high-school students are tested in March.

The elementary- and middle-school students take a test that was developed in partnership with New Hampshire and Vermont through the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). Students in grades 3 through 8 are tested in reading and mathematics; students in grades 5 and 8 are tested in writing.

High-school students take the New Standards Reference Exams in English language arts and mathematics. In the fall of 2007, high schools will begin taking the NECAP tests.

What reports will parents receive?

Districts are being provided with individual student reports the week of February 5th, which will be sent home to each family. These reports give a detailed breakdown of each student's score, showing how well the student performed in each subject area tested. A Spanish version of the student report is available on the RIDE web site, www.ride.ri.gov, see under "State Testing and Reporting".

What reports will schools and districts receive?

In addition, districts will receive reports that detail individual student responses to selected items on each test. These confidential reports will allow educators to examine their own instructional practices. They will be able to see which areas are being taught well and which may need further development.

What reports will be published on line?

State, district, and school reports, as well as statewide summaries, are available on line, through a link on the RIDE Web site, www.ride.ri.gov – see under "School Report Cards."

These reports show percentages of students at each of the four scoring levels on each test. They also present the scores for students broken down by demographic groups (gender, ethnicity) and by program participation (e.g., students with disabilities, English-language learners).

How well did my school do?

RIDE will use these test results to calculate the school-performance classifications and to determine whether schools and districts met all their targets, as set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Schools and districts must meet performance targets for the school/district as a whole and for each of eight groups of students (African-American, White, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, English-language learners, students living in poverty, students with disabilities). Schools that miss targets may face sanctions, such as

having to provide supplementary educational services. School-performance classifications for elementary and middle schools will be released in the spring of 2007.

Is my school improving?

This year marks the second year of NECAP tests. The 2006 results can be compared with the 2005 results as a measure of school improvement. Of course, any gains in scores are a good indication of improvement. Similarly, we hope not to see a decrease in the percent of students reaching proficiency. But the extent of gains or losses needs to be considered by looking at the magnitude of the change and the size of the school. Smaller schools are more susceptible to artificial changes because of the influence of what is called sampling error. That is why school administrators are given test interpretation manuals, also available on the RIDE web site, that provide specific guidelines about how to interpret their school and district scores.

Why did Rhode Island's Writing Assessment scores go down while the state scores went up in mathematics and reading?

Why did RIDE adopt a new set of tests?

For many years, RIDE tested grades 4 and 8 plus a high-school grade. In 2001, NCLB required all states to annually test grades 3 through 8 plus a high-school grade. So RIDE had to greatly expand the state assessment program and more closely align the assessments to revised curriculum standards at each grade level. By working together with two nearby states, we were able to develop a much better test that is directly tied to state standards and to classroom instruction. The tests, first administered in October 2005, will cost Rhode Island about \$13 million (in federal funds) over six years. But it is estimated that Rhode Island saved about \$5 million through economies of scale by working with other states.