

RICAS Assessment Transition 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) created this FAQ document to assist Superintendents and school leaders in explaining the public release of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS). The 2017-2018 school year was the first year of administration for the RICAS assessment for students in grades 3 through 8. While the transition allowed Rhode Island to maintain the same learning standards, the use of a new assessment tool makes a direct year-over-year comparison impossible. This document will help you to explain the shift to families and your school community: why the transition was necessary, how it will benefit our state in the long-term, and how families can understand their child's progress. The FAQs are broken into two sections, one for school and district leaders, and another geared specifically towards families.

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Why did we change tests?

As you may know, the PARCC Consortium originally consisted of 24 states. Today, very few states remain in the consortium. Seeing this shift take place, and knowing that Rhode Island needed a stable, long-term strategy, we made the choice to transition to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Massachusetts is a global leader in education, in large part because they have maintained a consistent path for the past 20 years. Rhode Island wants to do the same, and by aligning our assessments to Massachusetts, we provide an apples-to-apples comparison on student achievement with our neighboring state. The RICAS also allowed us to maintain the same learning standards while reducing testing time and positioning ourselves for the future.

How do we compare our results from last year to this year?

A true year-over-year comparison is not possible because although our learning standards have remained the same, the RICAS has a more difficult performance standard than did the PARCC (i.e., the test is "more difficult"). We understand that this is a challenge, because it is natural for families and the media to want to do this type of comparison. There is another way to look at year over year changes, which involves the use of "growth scores." It is more important in this first year of using the RICAS to explain *why* the transition to new assessments was necessary, though, and how this transition will position Rhode Island well over the next decade.

Why did it take so long to get my data?

This is a transition year, both because it is our first year of administration for the RICAS, and because we are creating new School and District Report Card platform under ESSA. We also needed to perform additional analyses to help educators, families, and the public better understand and utilize the data during this transition year. In particular, we needed to calculate and distribute growth scores between two different assessments that use the same underlying learning standards. We felt it was important to update our parent reports to include these

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growth scores, giving families additional context about how their child performed and how to interpret the results.

What is a growth score and how is it calculated?

A growth score helps to explain how a student's change in learning compares to students who performed similarly to them the prior year. At a minimum, two consecutive data points (e.g., a student's test scores from his or her grade 4 and grade 5 math tests) are needed for the calculation. This is why the number of students who participated in RICAS may be different than the number of students with growth scores. Each student's growth is compared to that of his or her academic peers. Academic peers are all students statewide with a similar score history, regardless of student demographic data or program information (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, IEP, ELL). The student's growth is measured and reported as a "Student Growth Percentile ranging from 1-99, with higher values indicating more growth relative to academic peers." For example, a student with a Student Growth Percentile (SGP) of 90 showed more growth than 90% of his or her academic peers. This approach is similar to how physicians use percentiles for height and weight to explain a baby's growth relative to other babies.

How do I explain to parents why a student's score may appear lower than in years past?

While the tests measure the same content and have similar questions, the technical difference between PARCC and RICAS is that RICAS assessments require students to reach a higher performance standard. In other words, the content standards (what we expect student to know and be able to do) are the same, but the performance we expect students to demonstrate has become more rigorous. For families, a more simplified way to explain it is that students must earn a higher score in order to reach proficiency. The growth score is designed to help families understand their child's progress. The growth score shows how a student performed on RICAS in comparison with their peers who scored similarly on the PARCC in previous years. Growth scores are included in the RICAS parent reports, which families will receive in December.

How does Rhode Island compare to Massachusetts?

For the first time, we can make a direct comparison between our two states thanks to the transition to RICAS. That being said, we have known for many years, based on other assessments and national data, that Massachusetts significantly outperforms Rhode Island. Using the same assessment tool makes that gap abundantly clear.

What is the key to success in Massachusetts, and how can we replicate it here?

Massachusetts has achieved dramatically better results, not because they have smarter students or better teachers, but because they have maintained high standards for educational excellence for more than 20 years. Rhode Island is working to adopt the same kind of long-term, consistent strategy that is anchored in the levers that we know move the needle for teaching and learning – things like high quality, aligned curriculum; advanced coursework for students; and a coherent strategy for meaningful ongoing professional learning for educators.

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What does this mean for school accountability?

Later in December, we will be ready to roll out our new School and District Report Cards. The 2017-2018 school year assessment results for RICAS, PSAT and SAT will be incorporated into the platform, and so will additional measures of school accountability, including teacher and student chronic absence and discipline rates. You can learn more about the overall system of accountability [through this webinar](#).

FOR FAMILIES

What does the RICAS score mean for my child?

Test scores are only one measure of student performance, but they do provide important information, especially for your child's school. This information can help you, your child's teachers, and your school leaders to better understand how your child is performing, and in what areas he or she needs additional support.

Why does this score look different from years past?

The test your child took in the 2017-2018 school year – the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (or RICAS) – is different from the test used in prior years. Last year was the first year of the RICAS, which will now give our state a direct comparison with student performance in Massachusetts. Rhode Island learning standards remained the same, but the expectations are higher on the RICAS, so you may see changes from how your child has performed in the past.

Why did Rhode Island change tests?

Massachusetts is considered not only a national leader, but also a global leader in education, and we want to position Rhode Island to have the same kind of long-term, consistent strategy around public education. To do that well, we need to be able to directly compare student performance. Testing time for RICAS is also a little shorter than our previous test, which is good news for students and teachers.

What is a growth score?

When you transition to a different test, and especially a more challenging test, a direct year-over-year comparison becomes impossible. The growth score can help you make sense of how your child performed. Basically, it shows how your child performed on RICAS compared to his or her peers who scored similarly on the PARCC in previous years. A Student Growth Percentile (SGP) describes your child's learning over time compared with his or her peers, that is, other students who had similar scores on previous state tests. An SGP is a number between 1 (*least* growth) and 99 (*most* growth). If, for example, your child has an SGP of 80, we can say your child showed more growth than 80 percent of his or her academic peers.

What will my child's school do with this information?

Again, test scores are only one measure of student performance, but teachers can learn more about your child's academic needs with these results. RICAS provides objective feedback on your child's progress through elementary and secondary school grades. When students are

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performing below their grade-level expectations, we hope that their RICAS score reports will prompt constructive conversations among parents, teachers, and school counselors. Considered with their classroom participation, day-to-day performance and other in-school assessments, this information helps show where your child is on track and where he or she may need more assistance.

What can I do with this information?

Reach out and talk to your child's teachers about the results. Bring them to the next parent-teacher conference so you can discuss how you and your child's school can support his or her academic goals. At home, talk to your child about his or her day at school to reinforce the material being learned. Make school attendance a priority every day, establish daily reading routines in your home, and stay connected to your child's school. Children whose families stress the value of education are more likely to find it important, as well.

Why did my child not receive a student report when they took the RICAS test last year?

To ensure that a student's score accurately reflects their knowledge and skills, students who do not complete at least one operational test item in each session will not receive a score or student report.

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