

MEMO

Date: 10/7/2025

To: Dr. Ed Condon

From: Dr. Christine Trendel

RE: Updated Assessment ISBE Proficiency Benchmark Updates and MAP 2025 Norms

Overview of New ISBE Proficiency Benchmarks

The Illinois State Board of Education released new proficiency benchmarks for all statewide assessments in August 2025. (Original benchmarks were released in 2017). These new benchmarks will be used for the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) (Grades 3-8, ELA and math), the Illinois Science Assessment (ISA) (Grades 5 and 8), and the ACT (Grades 9, 10, 11).

The new proficiency benchmarks use consistent language across four levels of proficiency. The assessments (content, questions, rubrics,) and the standards (what students are expected to know) have **not** changed.

ISBE shares that the intention of the new proficiency benchmarks is, "... to align to real college and career readiness expectations. The new performance levels are designed to ensure that 'proficient' means a student is truly on track for success after high school."

Summary of New Proficiency Benchmark Changes:

- Consistent versus varied proficiency levels across all Illinois assessments
- Four levels of proficiency with consistent language: below proficient, approaching proficiency, proficient, and above proficient
- The benchmark (cut score) for defining proficiency has changed. For example, the cut score for IAR proficiency was previously 750 for all grades 3-8 for math and reading. The proficiency cut score now varies by grade level and content area.

Previous Proficiency Levels

IAR	Does Not Meet	Partially Meets	Approaching Meets	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
ISA	Emerging	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary	
SAT	Partially Meets	Approaching Meets	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	

New Proficiency Levels

IAR	Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
ISA	Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
ACT	Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient

New Aligned Benchmarks for Proficiency							
		ELA		Math		Science	
		Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
IAR & ISA	Grade 3	750	735	750	732		
	Grade 4	750	737	750	740		
	Grade 5	750	739	750	740	799	812
	Grade 6	750	741	750	742		
	Grade 7	750	743	750	745		
ACT	Grade 8	750	745	750	745	799	812
	Grade 9*	N/A	14	N/A	17	N/A	14
	Grade 10*	N/A	15	N/A	18	N/A	16
	Grade 11*	N/A	18	N/A	19	N/A	19

The ISBE Review Process

ISBE used an 18-month review process. This process included:

- Presenting information at statewide and regional conferences
- Hosted listening tour to garner feedback from stakeholders with nine stops throughout IL
- Working groups of over 100 educators drafted performance descriptors that define proficiency at each grade level and standard as well as identified samples of student work to demonstrate how to interpret the performance descriptors.
- Drafts of descriptors, both the summary and detail versions, were posted twice for public viewing with options to submit digital feedback.
- Independent oversight was provided throughout the process to ensure integrity.
- Updates were finalized by highly qualified educators and subject matter experts and voted on by the State Board of Education in August 2025.

ISBE Rationale for Need of New Proficiency Benchmarks

- Illinois students' classroom performance data and assessment data were consistently discrepant., i.e.:
 - Groups of students were consistently demonstrating proficiency on the ISA but not mastering class materials. This showed that ISA proficiency expectations were too low.
 - Groups of students were demonstrating proficiency in ELA and math in classrooms, but not demonstrating proficiency on IAR.
- Illinois has had the most restrictive cut scores for proficiency in math and ELA in the nation.
- Illinois' high school students are out-performing national averages on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and Advanced Placement (AP) assessments, but some of those same students are not meeting proficiency on IL assessments.
- U.S. World and News Report ranks Illinois fourth in the nation for Pre-K-12 education, fifth for college readiness, seventh for NAEP reading scores and ninth for preschool enrollment.
- Results from the 2024 NAEP show Illinois students performed above

the national average in eighth grade reading and math.

- Illinois' high school graduation rate in 2024 reached an all-time, 14-year high at 87.7%.
- There are examples of some IL high school students with 4.0 GPAs, multiple AP course completions, extracurricular activities, who are not demonstrating proficiency on the state assessments yet enrolling and showing success in 4-year universities. This sends conflicting messages to educators, students, and families.

Student Growth Percentiles

According to ISBE, “While the definition of “proficient” is changing, this change does not affect students’ raw scale scores or the calculation of Student Growth Percentiles.” Because raw scale scores are not impacted, D90 is able to continue to compare performance of our students on the ISA and IAR over time.

While we cannot compare proficiency rates to prior years, we can utilize the Student Growth Percentile to analyze how D90 students’ performance on state assessments compares to prior years’ performances and to other school districts.

According to ISBE: The Student Growth Percentile describes how much a student grew compared to their academic peers who started at the same level. An academic peer is a student in the same grade and the same subject with the same test score in the previous year. The SGP represents a percentile, not a percent. It tells you how students’ growth on average compares to other students’ growth. It does not indicate how much they grew, only whether their growth was above or below the state average, which is always the 50th percentile.

ISBE Expectations for Outcomes of New Proficiency Benchmarks

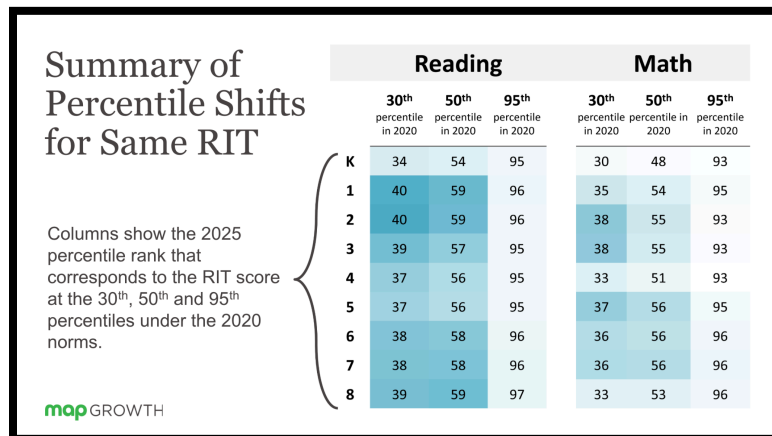
- Improved alignment between student classroom and assessment performance
- Improved clarity for educators and families regarding proficiency and student readiness

Helpful Additional Resources

- ISBE [Fact Sheet for Families](#)
- ISBE Public [Presentation](#) Slides
- ISBE [FAQ](#)
- ISBE [Performance Descriptors and Samples to Success](#)

MAP 2025 Norms: Summary of Changes

- “Distribution shifted down *and* became more variable. Expect larger shifts at lower achievement levels and smaller shifts at higher achievement levels.”
- Students will typically have higher percentile ranks with the new 2025 norms than with the previous 2020 norms.



- D90 MTSS teams and leaders are reviewing our district criteria for intervention as a result of these shifts and may make some changes.
- We will continue to use multiple data sources and data points to make placement and intervention decisions for students.

Helpful Additional Resources

- More detailed explanation [slides](#) from NWEA
- Video [tutorial](#) of updated MAP Norms
- NWEA [article](#) on updated MAP Norms