

New Proficiency Benchmarks: What Families Need to Know

What does “proficient” mean?

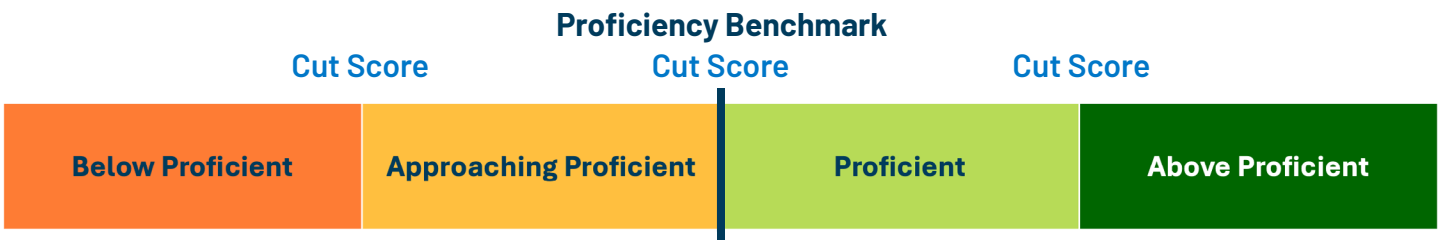
Being proficient means your child is on track in their learning.

Each spring, students in Illinois take required tests:

- Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR)
- PreACT or ACT
- Illinois Science Assessment (ISA)

Performance levels are the score ranges that divide the full spectrum of performance on the state assessment into categories. Each state decides how many levels there are, the cut scores that divide each level, and which levels qualify as “proficient.” The proficiency benchmark is the score a student needs to reach on a state assessment to be considered on track in their learning for their grade level.

New, Unified Performance Levels for All State Tests



Why does proficiency matter?

Having accurate data about student performance is essential for:

Reporting The state reports how many students at each school scored “proficient” on each test. This is known as the proficiency rate. (Illinois publishes proficiency rates on the Illinois Report Card.)	Accountability The state uses proficiency rates as one of multiple measures to help decide which schools need extra support and funding.	Local Decision-Making Schools use state test scores (along with classroom performance and local assessment results) to decide if a student should get extra help, like tutoring or summer school, or opportunities for acceleration.	School Improvement Teachers and principals use this data to improve teaching and learning for all students.
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What’s the problem with the old proficiency benchmarks?

For years, Illinois’ assessment data has sent the wrong message to students, families, and educators. Proficiency rates on state assessments did not match up to realities in the classroom and did not align to real college and career readiness expectations.

Illinois has had the toughest benchmarks in the country for math and English language arts — meaning, many students who were doing well in school were somehow not “proficient” on state assessments.

In science, the bar was too low, so many students looked “proficient” on paper, even if they hadn’t fully mastered the material.

Why was that confusing?

- Each test had a different number of performance levels with different names.
- Families, students, and teachers got mixed messages about student performance and whether students were college and career ready.
- The performance levels did not match how well students were doing in class and on other trusted indicators of student success.



Real Student Example East St. Louis Senior High School



- 4.0 GPA
- Six dual credit courses
- Consistent summer employment
- Work-based learning experience
- 10+ clubs and leadership activities
- English language arts: 500 (“not proficient”)
- Math: 530 (“not proficient”)

Our assessment cut scores told them they were **not proficient** or college ready. If they had believed us, maybe they would not have enrolled in those AP courses or college.

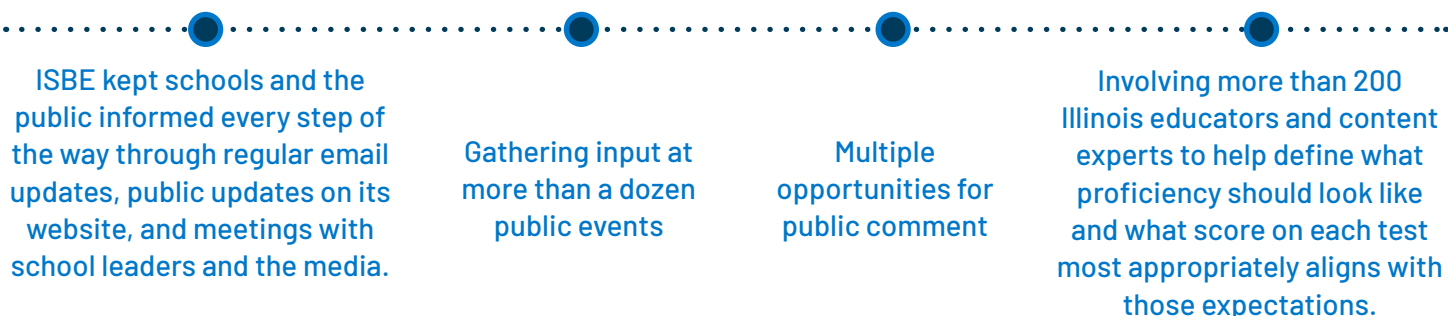


This student is currently enrolled at Southwestern Illinois College, demonstrating how misaligned our assessment proficiency benchmarks were to what it actually takes to get into and succeed in college.

What is changing?	What is NOT changing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New benchmarks for proficiency that better reflect real college and career readiness expectations• Unified performance levels on all tests:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above Proficient• Proficient• Approaching Proficient• Below Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The tests themselves• The state learning standards (what students are expected to know and be able to do)

How did the state decide on the new benchmarks?

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) took its time to get this right. The process began in March 2024 and took 18 months, including:



The process to develop the new performance levels was led by educators and validated by external experts. ISBE's North Star throughout the effort was to align the proficiency benchmarks to real college and career expectations: the ACT scores necessary for students to get into college, pass college coursework, and succeed in the workforce.

When will I get my child's score?

You'll receive your child's Individual Score Report for any state test they took in spring 2025 through your school this fall. These results will include your child's score and performance level (e.g., proficient), as well as a Student Growth Percentile that will allow you to compare your child's performance to other students and to prior years.

How do I interpret the Student Growth Percentile?

The Student Growth Percentile (SGP) describes how much a student grew compared to their peers who started at the same level.

The SGP represents a percentile – not a percent. It tells you how your student's 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. It's like when the pediatrician says your child is in the 75th percentile for height, that means your child is taller than 75% of other children of the same age.

Where can I see school, district, and state results?

You'll find school, district, and state proficiency rates Oct. 30 on the Illinois Report Card website: www.illinoisreportcard.com

What is the impact of the new benchmarks on proficiency rates going forward?

These shifts show that the old benchmarks were too high in ELA and math and too low in science. The new numbers give a more accurate picture of student learning. We won't be able to compare proficiency rates going forward to prior years, but you can still track your own student's growth by comparing their score or their Student Growth Percentile, since those measures are not affected by the new performance levels.

	2024 Percentage of All Students That Were Proficient	2025 with New Benchmarks, Projected Percentage of All Students That Were Proficient
Science	53%	45%
ELA	41%	53%
Math	28%	38%

How can I use my child’s test results to support their learning?

You can use state test results along with report cards, classwork, and teacher feedback to understand how your child is doing. Assessment scores are one piece of the puzzle. If your child scores “approaching proficient” or “below proficient,” talk to their teacher about how you can support their learning at home or access extra help. If your child scores “proficient” or “above proficient,” talk to their teacher about opportunities for advancement or accelerated learning to ensure they stay challenged.

Why does my child take multiple tests?

State tests like IAR, ACT, and ISA are required by federal law. They measure what your child has learned over the full school year.

Other tests that your child might take, like NWEA MAP or i-Ready, are chosen by schools locally to track progress during the year and help teachers adjust instruction for individual students.

Will my child be able to graduate if they do not reach proficient?

Your child does not need to score proficient to graduate. State graduation requirements in Illinois are based on students getting passing grades in required courses, not on test scores. Your local school district may have additional graduation requirements, like community service or additional coursework. You can view all of the state graduation requirements on the [ISBE website](#).

How can I learn more about these changes?

Click or scan to learn more at www.isbe.net/feedback.

