



UNITED TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 30

1275 AVENUE OF THE CITIES | EAST MOLINE, IL 61244 | 309.752.1633

New Assessment Proficiency Benchmarks

To: The Board of Education

From: Shannon Kane Miller, Director of Curriculum/Instruction

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Subject: Overview, Rationale, and Impact of New Unified State Assessment Proficiency Benchmarks (Cut Scores)

Summary

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has implemented new, unified performance levels and corresponding cut scores for state assessments (IAR, ACT, and ISA) to correct a long-standing misalignment between assessment data and real student performance, particularly concerning college and career readiness. Previously, Illinois' benchmarks for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math were among the most restrictive in the nation, often mislabeling high-achieving, college-ready students as "not proficient". Conversely, the Science benchmark was set too low, overstating student mastery.

The new benchmarks, approved following an 18-month, educator-led process, are designed to deliver accurate and meaningful data to students, families, and educators. This change is crucial for properly targeting state resources, making informed instructional decisions, and providing students with a clear picture of their readiness for post-secondary success.

I. Explanation of the New Unified Cut Scores

The state assessment system is transitioning from various, confusing performance levels with different names (e.g., *Meets Expectations*, *Emerging*) to a consistent four-level system across all assessments:

- Above Proficient
- Proficient
- Approaching Proficient
- Below Proficient



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Rationale for the Change

The goal is to "Right-Size" the benchmarks. The previous misalignment was rooted in:

1. **Overly Restrictive ELA/Math Benchmarks:** Illinois' ELA benchmarks were the **most restrictive in the country**. In 4th Grade Math, the benchmark was the most difficult to reach nationally, and for all other grades/subjects, they ranked among the top four most restrictive. High school benchmarks (previously SAT) were set 60 points higher in ELA and 10 points higher in Math than the College Board's own college readiness benchmarks.
2. **Too Low Science Benchmarks:** The Illinois Science Assessment (ISA) benchmark was set too low, often based on unrepresentative 2021 pandemic-era data, leading to inflated proficiency results that did not align with classroom realities.

Alignment to College and Career Expectations

The new standards align proficiency to real college and career expectations. The benchmark for the high school assessment (ACT) is directly linked to post-secondary success data.

- For instance, the new ELA proficiency benchmark aligns with the **minimum ACT score (18)** needed to place into English Composition I at Illinois colleges, such as Eastern Illinois University.
- A student scoring at the new Math proficiency level (e.g., ACT score of 19) has a **63% chance** of earning a C or higher in college credit-bearing math coursework.

II. Impact on Students and Families

The new cut scores provide a **truer picture of student performance**.

- **Accurate Readiness Signals:** Students and families will receive better, more meaningful college and career readiness signals. Students who are successful in rigorous high school courses (e.g., AP, dual credit) are far less likely to be inaccurately labeled "not proficient".
- **Targeted Support and Acceleration:** Accurate proficiency data enables schools to better identify students for both acceleration opportunities (as per the Accelerated Placement Act) and for necessary additional supports, rather than misdirecting resources.



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- **Score Interpretation:** Proficiency data impacts individual score reports and helps families understand how their child is progressing, but it does not impact grade promotion, graduation requirements, or eligibility for an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
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III. Impact on Teachers and District Accountability

The clarity and accuracy of the new benchmarks benefit the instructional environment and the district's accountability framework.

- **Instructional Clarity:** Teachers now have performance levels that more closely match classroom realities. This coherence across assessments allows for more consistent expectations and instructional planning from elementary through high school.
 - **Accountability and Resources:** Proficiency rates are one of the key metrics used by the state to determine School Accountability Designations and identify which schools need extra support and funding. Accurate proficiency data ensures that state resources and taxpayer dollars are directed to the students and schools that truly need them.
 - **Tracking Progress Over Time:** The district will maintain its ability to track student progress over time. The new performance levels and cut scores do not affect the raw scale scores. The **Student Growth Percentile (SGP)**, which uses these raw scores, will continue to provide an "apples-to-apples comparison" of student growth from year to year. ISBE will calculate SGP for high school for the first time using the 2025 data.
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