



Question: You asked for information about proficiency standards, including:

1. How many performance levels exist in each state?
2. What are the levels are called?
3. What student consequences exist for failure to meet standards?
4. What are the policy/technical definitions for the standards?
5. What is the broader policy landscape that has led to changes in performance levels/assessments?

Our Response: This response is in five parts that correspond with the numbered questions above. Questions one and two are answered in the table below. Questions three, four and five are addressed in the sections following the table.

How many performance levels exist in each state and what are the levels called?*

*Information provided is for math & English-language arts assessments for grades 3-8 only	Number of Performance Levels	Performance Level Descriptor	Test Used for 2015-16
Alabama	3	Ready, Close, or In Need of Support	ACT Aspire
Alaska	4	Levels 1-4	Alaska Measures of Progress (RFP out)
Arizona	4	Minimally proficient, partially proficient, proficient, highly proficient	AZMerit (AIR)
Arkansas	3	Ready, Close, or In Need of Support	ACT Aspire
California	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded ¹	SmarterBalanced
Colorado	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations,	PARCC

¹ Where state-specific performance level descriptors were unavailable for PARCC or SmarterBalanced states, the descriptor used by the appropriate testing consortia are listed.

		met expectations, exceeded expectations	
Connecticut	4	Does not meet, approaching, meets, exceeds the achievement level	SmarterBalanced
D.C.	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC
Delaware	4	Well below standard, below standard, meet standard, advanced	SmarterBalanced
Florida	5	Inadequate, below satisfactory, satisfactory, proficient, mastery	Florida Standard Assessments (AIR)
Georgia	4	Beginning Learner, Developing Learner, Proficient Learner, and Distinguished Learner	Georgia Milestones Assessment System
Hawaii	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
Idaho	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
Illinois	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC

Indiana	3	Pass+, pass, did not pass	ISTEP+
Iowa	3	Not proficient, proficient, advanced	Iowa Assessments
Kansas	4	Level 1-4	Kansas Assessment Program
Kentucky	4	Novice, apprentice, proficient, distinguished	K-PREP
Louisiana	5	Unsatisfactory, approaching basic, basic, proficient, mastery	LEAP
Maine	New test for spring 2016	New test for spring 2016	Maine Comprehensive Assessment System
Maryland	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC
Massachusetts	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC (some districts use MCAS; new test in 2017)
Michigan	4	Not proficient, partially proficient, proficient, advanced	M-STEP (state/SmarterBalanced hybrid)
Minnesota	4	Does not meet, partially meets, meets, exceeds the standards	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments
Mississippi	New test for spring 2016	New test for spring 2016	Mississippi Assessment Program

Missouri	4	Below basic, basic, proficient, advanced	Missouri Assessment Program
Montana	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
Nebraska	3	Below the standards, meets the standards, exceeds the standards	NeSA
Nevada	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
New Hampshire	4	Does not meet, approaching, meets, exceeds the achievement level	SmarterBalanced
New Jersey	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC
New Mexico	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC
New York	4	NYS Level 1-4	NY State Testing Program
North Carolina	5	Limited command, partial command, sufficient command, solid command, superior command	NC End-of-Grade Tests
North Dakota	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced

Ohio	5	Limited, basic, proficient, accelerated, advanced	State (AIR)
Oklahoma	4	Unsatisfactory, limited knowledge, proficient, advanced	Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests
Oregon	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
Pennsylvania	4	Below basic, basic, proficient, advanced	Pennsylvania System of School Assessments
Rhode Island	5	Did not meet expectations, partially met expectations, approached expectations, met expectations, exceeded expectations	PARCC
South Carolina	3	Ready, Close, or In Need of Support	ACT Aspire
South Dakota	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
Tennessee	4	Being renamed	TNReady
Texas	3	Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, advanced	STAAR
Utah	4	Below proficient, approaching proficient, proficient, highly proficient	Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence
Vermont	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced

Virginia	4	Fail/basic below, fail/basic, pass/proficient, pass/advanced	Virginia Standards of Learning
Washington	4	Standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met, standard exceeded	SmarterBalanced
West Virginia	4	Levels 1-4	SmarterBalanced
Wisconsin	New test for spring 2016	New test for spring 2016	Wisconsin Forward Exam
Wyoming	3	Basic, proficient, advanced	Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students

What student consequences exist, if any, for failure to meet performance standards?

Third grade retention. A number of states have chosen to use third grade retention as a strategy to improve third grade reading proficiency. Education Commission of the States’ most recent look [50-state look at third grade reading policies](#) (Dec. 2014) revealed 16 states, plus the District of Columbia,² that require retention of third grade students who do not meet grade-level expectations in reading. **South Carolina** will begin requiring retention in the 2017-18 school year. Since that time, **Nevada** has also passed [legislation](#) requiring retention.

Retention in other grades. While we were not able to complete a 50-state scan for this response, we were able to identify a number of states that have laws in place requiring retention of students in certain grades. The states highlighted below – **California**, the **District of Columbia**, **Georgia** and **Louisiana** – have “promotion gate” policies. These policies set a performance threshold that a student is expected to meet before being promoted to the next grade.

California: Districts are required to adopt a policy regarding promotion and retention of students:

- Between second and third grade
- Between third and fourth grade
- Between fourth and fifth grade
- Between the end of intermediate grades and the beginning of middle school
- Between the end of middle school and the beginning of high school

The policy must provide for the identification of students who should be retained, or who are at risk of being retained, on the basis of failing to meet minimum performance standards on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress or on the basis of grades or other indicators of academic achievement designed by the

² Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee and Washington.

district. For the younger two grades, the identification of students is based on reading level; in the older three grades, it's based on reading, English language arts and math proficiency.

The law specifies that identified students must be retained unless the student's regular classroom teacher determines in writing that retention is not the appropriate intervention. Parents must be notified, as early in the school year as practicable, when their student is identified as being at risk of retention. Further, there is an appeals process for retention decisions. Finally, the policy must indicate how opportunities for remedial instruction will be provided to students who are recommended for retention or identified as at risk for retention. ([Cal. Educ. Code § 48070.5](#))

District of Columbia: The superintendent is required to establish and implement promotion gates for math, reading and writing for at least one grade in K-4, with the grade four gate being required. In addition, the superintendent must establish promotion gates for at least one grade level for the fifth through eighth and ninth through twelfth grade spans. Promotion gates are required in eighth and twelfth grades. ([D.C. Code Ann. § 38-1803.21](#))

Georgia: The state board is required to adopt criteria for placement and promotion policies to be adopted by local boards that are consistent with the Georgia Academic Placement and Promotion Policy ([Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-282](#)). The criteria must require that third-grade students will not be promoted unless they achieve grade level on the third-grade end-of-grade reading assessment and meet all other promotion criteria. Students in fifth and eighth grade will not be promoted unless they achieve grade level on their grade's end-of-grade reading and math assessments and meet all other promotional criteria.

The parents of students not scoring at grade level must be notified, and the student must be retested with the end-of-grade test or an appropriate alternative assessment. In addition, the student must be provided with an opportunity for accelerated, differentiated or additional instruction. Students who fail the second test will be retained and their parents notified. Appeals of promotion decisions are decided by a review placement committee. ([Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-283](#))

Louisiana: The Department of Education, with the approval of the state board, must establish the level of achievement on fourth and eighth grade assessments as definitive of a student's level of proficiency in math, English language arts, science and social studies. In order to advance to the next grade, fourth and eighth grade students must demonstrate proficiency.

Districts are required to develop a pupil progression plan based on student achievement, performance and proficiency on assessments. In addition, districts must develop a policy regarding student promotion or placement. Teachers make promotion or placement decisions based on the policy. Decisions may be reviewed at the request of a local board, the superintendent or a student's parent or guardian. Students who fail to meet the required achievement levels must be offered education programs designed to accelerate progress, including, at a minimum, summer school for students who do not meet the level necessary to be promoted to fifth or ninth grade. ([La. Stat. Ann. § 17:24.4](#))

High school exit exams: Jennifer Zinth, director of ECS' High School and STEM Center, compiled the information contained in **Attachment A**, which may be helpful. Though its primary focus is end-of-course assessments, it also contains several state examples of exit exams. Please note there are a couple of states that use assessments other than end-of-course as exit exams, and they are not included in the document.

What are the policy/technical definitions for states' performance standards?

Last week, the American Institutes for Research released a report entitled [National Benchmarks for State Achievement Standards](#), which contains a good deal of information about achievement standard assessment proficiency levels. Tables 1 through 4 below, from pages 5 and 6 of the report, show the achievement standards for four assessments—Smarter Balanced, PARCC, ACT Aspire and NAEP.

Table 1: Smarter Balanced Achievement Standards

Subject	Grade	Level 2 Nearly Met	Level 3 Met	Level 4 Exceeded
ELA	4	2416	2473	2533
ELA	8	2487	2567	2668
Mathematics	4	2411	2485	2549
Mathematics	8	2504	2586	2653

Table 2: PARCC Performance Standards

Subject	Grade	Level 2 Partially Met	Level 3 Approached	Level 4 Met	Level 5 Exceeded
ELA	4	700	725	750	790
ELA	8	700	725	750	794
Mathematics	4	700	725	750	796
Mathematics	8	700	725	750	801

Table 3: ACT Aspire Achievement Standards

Subject	Grade	Level 2 Close	Level 3 Ready	Level 4 Exceeding
Reading	4	412	417	422
Reading	8	418	424	430
Mathematics	4	411	416	421
Mathematics	8	419	425	431

Table 4: NAEP Achievement Standards

Subject	Grade	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Reading	4	208	238	268
Reading	8	243	281	323
Mathematics	4	214	249	282
Mathematics	8	262	299	333

Source: [American Institutes for Research](#)

Another excellent source for this type of information is the [National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment](#). The executive director of the Center for Assessment, Scott Marion, can be reached at smarion@nceia.org or 603-516-7900.

What is the broader policy landscape that has led to changes in performance levels/assessments?

Many states have experienced recent pushback related to academic standards and/or aligned assessments. ECS’s recent [trends report](#) on assessments highlights many of the key factors in this changing landscape, including: 1) shifting assessment consortia membership, 2) the use of college entrance exams to meet federal testing requirements, 3) how states are coping with the transition to new assessments, 4) how states are dealing with testing time and opt-out issues, and 5) state responses to issues with assessment results.

For performance levels specifically, we are only aware of one state, Ohio, that has significantly parted from its original cut scores, which would affect how the state defines its performance levels. You can find definitions of cut scores, performance level descriptors, and other assessment vocabulary on page 7 of our trends report.