

Frequently Asked Questions READY Accountability and Testing 2012–13

1. What is proficiency?

At the student-level, meeting proficiency is to have mastered the content sufficiently and be on target for a “college and career” path. It is achieving a Level 3 or Level 4 on the End-of-Grade (EOG) or End-of-Course (EOC) assessments. Students who score a Level 1 or a Level 2 have not met the proficiency standard and are not on trajectory to be “college and career” ready. For school, district, or state accountability reports, the percent of students who meet proficiency is reported.

A student who meets proficiency has demonstrated mastery of the skills and knowledge of the standards in the Standard Course of Study. A group of teachers from across the State defined the extent to which a student must demonstrate mastery in order to be considered proficient.

A fuller description of the meaning of the proficiency levels is developed when the cut scores are established. The first task in the standard setting process is for the panelists to review the content standards and carefully delineated the performance expectations of a student in each achievement level. These content-based descriptions are known as Achievement Level Descriptors. These Achievement Level Descriptors are provided to parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to give meaning to the scale scores.

2. What is the performance composite?

The performance composite is the number of proficient scores on all EOGs and EOCs administered in a school divided by the number of all scores from all EOG and EOC assessments administered.

3. What is school accountability growth?

North Carolina uses EVAAS to report school accountability growth values. EVAAS reports whether a school’s students (not individual students) (1) did not meet expected growth, (2) met expected growth, or (3) exceeded expected growth. Schools meet expected growth when their students make progress that is similar to the progress at an average school in the State. Schools designated as having exceeded expectations have demonstrated that students grew more than students at the average school in the State.

4. What is the relationship between proficiency and growth?

Proficiency and growth are two different measures reported from the same test(s). Proficiency is a set bar of expectation which students must score to be deemed proficient. Growth is either maintaining (met expected growth) or increasing (exceeded expected growth) performance, but it does not mean that more students met the set bar for proficiency.

5. How can a school meet expected growth but have a low percentage of students who are proficient on the state tests?

The percent of students who are proficient is not a factor in determining growth in EVAAS. In fact, schools may have students who are high achieving but do not collectively demonstrate growth. One of

the purposes of growth is to identify where learning is increasing, remaining consistent, or falling short, particularly in situations where students are not meeting the proficiency standard. Rather than trying to relate the two measures, it is most useful to consider each independently. However, it is appropriate to include both in an evaluation of a school's overall performance. Schools meeting or exceeding growth are moving in the right direction, but the end goal is to have all students meet the proficiency standard.

6. Why do the percent of correct items vary across tests? For example, why does the Grade 3 English Language Arts/Reading EOG require students to answer more items correctly than the Grade 8 Mathematics EOG?

The number of items correct does not vary significantly across tests within a content area, such as across the grades 3-8 reading tests. The difference is notable across tests with different content, such as comparing the number of items correct for the reading and the mathematics tests. In response to this question, there are three aspects of standard setting that are useful to consider.

- a. Standard setting for a standards based assessment is grounded in the expectations as stated in the adopted content standards for reading, mathematics, and science and the achievement level descriptors of expected performance of students. The EOGs and EOCs are criterion-referenced tests intended to determine how well a student has mastered the content. A test which is scored based on the number of correct items is not considering the content on the whole, but rather knowing a certain percent of the content is acceptable. Such an approach does not take into account the content and/or difficulty of the test.
- b. A key factor in the percent of correct items not being consistent across the reading and mathematics tests is that the content is different for these two tests. There is much difference between the reading and the mathematics content standards. Reading is a skill that, once learned, is refined overtime and improved with respect to complexity and depth. Mathematics is comprised of many specific skills which build on each other, often requiring previous knowledge to acquire new knowledge. With these differences, it is not appropriate to expect the exact same outcome from the tests.
- c. It is important to remember that the standard setting process is not a collective process, but rather an independent process for each test. The standard setting panel for the Grade 3 English Language Arts/Reading EOG did not consider the outcome of the Grade 8 Mathematics EOG. Also, the number of correct items is part of the statistical outcome, but it is not part of the decision process. The standard setting panelists did not recommend academic achievement standards (cut scores) based on the number of correct items. The recommendation is based on the content of the items and whether the students defined in each of the Academic Achievement Levels (1, 2, 3, and 4) should be able to answer the item correctly.