
Achievement Levels and Descriptors

The Background:

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires states to establish achievement levels in the areas of mathematics, reading/language arts, and science. States have autonomy regarding the nomenclature and number of achievement levels; however, said designations must feature two levels representing high achievement, *proficient* and *advanced*, and one level denoting low achievement, *basic*.

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) recently revised state mathematics, language arts, and science curriculum standards in the effort to ensure high school graduates are adequately prepared to meet postsecondary and workforce demands. After completing the standards revision process, the TDOE reviewed and subsequently decided to revise the achievement levels used to describe the content knowledge and skills students must possess in order to demonstrate proficiency. The TDOE now proposes the following achievement levels: *not proficient*, *approaching proficient*, *proficient*, and *advanced*. The proposed achievement levels and their descriptors are defined in the attached table.

In 2001, the Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the existing achievement levels: *below proficient*, *proficient*, and *advanced*. Currently in Tennessee, *proficient* merely denotes *minimal competency*. Upon approval, the proposed achievement levels and their descriptors will establish a rigorous definition of *proficient* that will more closely mirror the delineation characteristic of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and other national assessments, thereby ensuring *truth in advertising* regarding student achievement.

In May 2008, the state's Assessment Advisory Committee met to develop new achievement level definitions for evaluating student mastery of the academic content standards as measured on all statewide assessments. The Committee included representatives from special education and ELL, higher education, and the business community.

Further, the achievement levels will yield diagnostic data essential to providing research-based interventions to students who perform below *proficient*. Because the TDOE proposes two levels below *proficient*, appropriate interventions can be designed and implemented for both students who are on the cusp of performing at the *proficient* level and lower-achieving students who warrant more intensive measures.

The Department is requesting approval of the general achievement level definitions, which are detailed in the attached chart. The Department will use these general definitions to develop specific definitions for each content area and grade, which will in turn be used to guide the standards-setting process for statewide assessments. These definitions are one of the most critical components to ensure that Tennessee's

statewide assessments report an accurate picture of student performance. These definitions will also be used by local educators to evaluate student mastery of the standards on classroom formative assessments.

The achievement levels and descriptors will become a component of the SBE Performance Model, Policy 2.100.

The Master Plan Connection:

This item supports the SBE Master Plan by providing a rigorous, relevant curriculum and effective measures of student outcomes.

Recommendation:

The Tennessee Department of Education recommends the proposed achievement levels and descriptors be adopted on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

Amend State Board Policy 2.100, **PERFORMANCE MODEL** by adding the language below as a new section following the **PERFORMANCE GOALS FOR TENNESSEE SCHOOL SYSTEMS** and before the section titled **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL**:

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, the TCAP results will be reported based on the four achievement levels.

1. **NOT PROFICIENT** – Students who perform at this level **have not** demonstrated mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skill specified by the grade/course level content standards and are not prepared for the next level of study.
2. **APPROACHING PROFICIENT** – Students who perform at this level demonstrate **partial** mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skill specified by the grade/course level content standards and are minimally prepared for the next level of study.
3. **PROFICIENT** – Students who perform at this level demonstrate **mastery** in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skill specified by the grade/course level content standards and are prepared for the next level of study.
4. **ADVANCED** – Students who perform at this level demonstrate **superior** mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skill specified by the grade/course level content standards and are significantly prepared for the next level of study.

ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS

ADVANCED	PROFICIENT
<i>Students who perform at this level demonstrate superior mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skills specified by the grade/course level content standards and are significantly prepared for the next level of study.</i>	<i>Students who perform at this level demonstrate mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skills specified by the grade/course level content standards and are well prepared for the next level of study.</i>
APPROACHING PROFICIENT	NOT PROFICIENT
<i>Students who perform at this level demonstrate partial mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skills specified by the grade/course level content standards and are minimally prepared for the next level of study.</i>	<i>Students who perform at this level have not demonstrated mastery in academic performance, thinking abilities, and application of understandings that reflect the knowledge and skills specified by the grade/course level content standards and are not prepared for the next level of study.</i>