

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF BENCHMARKS TOWARD ATTAINING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Executive Summary

Benchmarks for Making Progress toward English Language Proficiency

The [Language Opportunity for Our Kids Act \(LOOK Act\)](#) provides for greater flexibility in English learner education (ELE) programs, greater focus on individual English learner (EL) success, and better support for the academic achievement of ELs. It also requires that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) develop benchmarks for attaining English language proficiency for ELs. The Department will define and disseminate to districts each fall the English language proficiency benchmarks, or individual targets, for each student's annual progress toward English proficiency.

Meeting benchmarks means that an EL is on track to attain English proficiency within six years of entering a Massachusetts public school. Some ELs will attain English proficiency before year six, while others may take longer. Students are not required to become proficient within a specific period, but research indicates that ELs typically achieve proficiency in four to seven years. The Department determined six years to be a reasonable period for an EL to attain English proficiency.

Calculating Benchmarks

Based on a student's current year [ACCESS](#) score, the Department determines a target for the following year that is the minimum score needed by the student to remain on track to attaining English proficiency (i.e., attaining a score of at least Level 4.2 on ACCESS) within six years. For students taking the [Alternate ACCESS](#), the Department will determine progress toward proficiency by comparing the prior year's results and the current year's results to see whether the scores for one or more subdomains of the test have increased by at least one proficiency level.

Each year after the Department reports ACCESS scores, schools and districts will receive a *future progress target* and a *difficulty index* for the following school year for each student. If the student has taken the ACCESS test for at least two consecutive years, they will also receive a *growth percentile for ACCESS* (SGPA) and a *progress indicator* (expressed as "yes" if the student made progress or "no" if the student did not make progress). For more information on future progress targets and difficulty indices, refer to Section III of the [Guidelines for the Use of Benchmarks toward Attaining English Proficiency](#) (the Benchmark Guidelines).

District Requirements:

The LOOK Act establishes the following requirements for districts:

- Adopt procedures to identify ELs who do not meet English proficiency benchmarks;
- Establish a process for the district to:
 - Identify the areas in which identified ELs need improvement and establish personalized goals for attaining English proficiency;
 - Assess and track the progress of ELs who did not meet benchmarks in the identified areas in need of improvement;
 - Review resources and services available to assist ELs in the identified areas in need of improvement; and
 - Incorporate input from the parents or legal guardian¹ of the identified EL².

English Learning Success Template

The Department developed an English Learning Success Template (ELST) to assist districts in helping ELs receive the planning and support they need to make progress. The template identifies the steps that schools and districts can take to help students meet their goals and benchmarks.

Methods for Establishing EL Personalized Goals

In order to establish goals for success, districts should review the available data on a EL's performance, and identify areas of improvement. By involving various stakeholders, including students, parents, and staff, districts can implement successful strategies for improvement. Further, by consulting with other districts during network meetings, districts can gather additional strategies for helping ELs succeed. In addition, there are many resources available with helpful information for working with ELs included in the Benchmark Guidelines.

Parent Notification

Districts must adopt procedures to identify ELs who do not meet English proficiency benchmarks and establish a process that incorporates input from the parents of the identified ELs. The LOOK Act requires districts to provide parents of ELs with the Benchmark Guidelines, materials describing the benchmarks, and the ELST. The Department will make the Benchmark Guidelines and the ELST available in languages most commonly spoken in Massachusetts and will post them on the Department's [English Learner Resources](#) webpage to assist districts with this effort. Districts must begin parent notification at the beginning of each school year or upon

¹ The term "parent" means "parent or legal guardian" throughout this document.

² [G.L. c. 71A, § 11](#).

enrollment of the child in an ELE program if the enrollment is not concurrent with the beginning of the school year.