

# INTRODUCTION

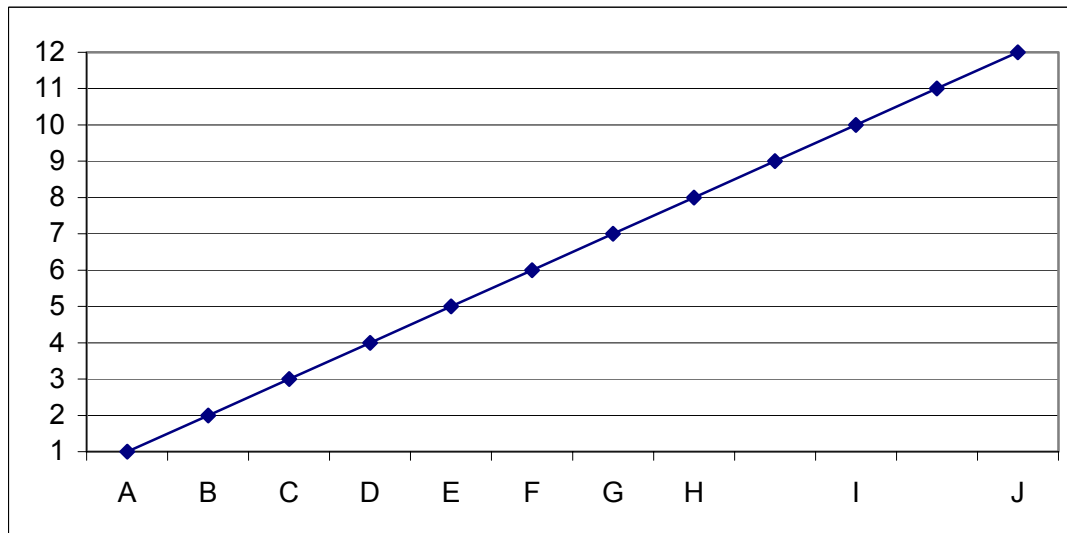
## *Design for Performance Standards*

The Illinois Learning Standards are content standards that describe “*what*” students should know and be able to do in grades K – 12. Each content standard includes five benchmarks that describe what students should know and be able to do at early elementary, late elementary, middle/junior high, early high school, and late high school.

The challenge for the 2000-2001 school year was to produce performance standards that would indicate “*how well*” students should perform to meet the standards. To address this challenge, a number of perspectives needed to be considered. For example, the National Governors Association<sup>1</sup> raised two pertinent questions policymakers should consider for the design of performance standards:

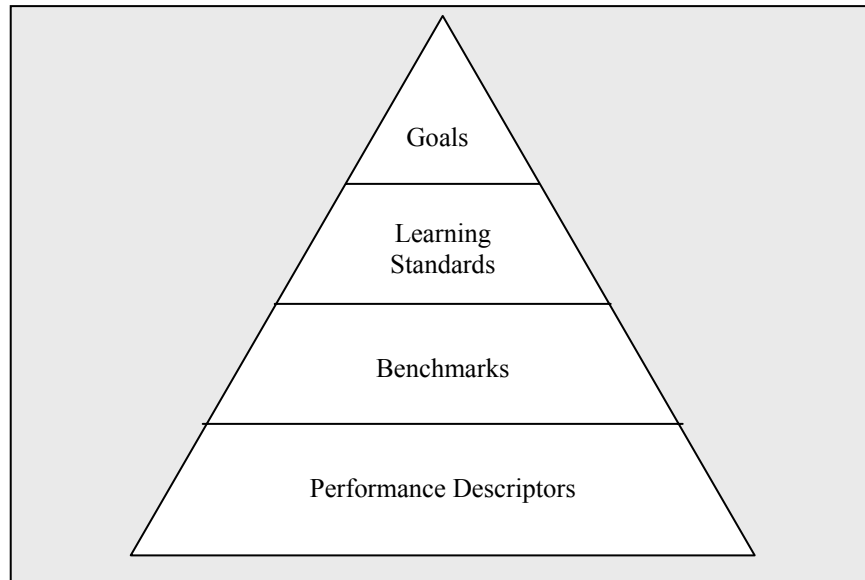
- Do the performance standards indicate the levels of performance students should attain, descriptions of performance at each level, and rules that enable educators to determine whether students have reached a given level?
- Do the performance standards include a range of work . . . to show that students can meet the standards in a variety of ways?

The performance standards describe how well students perform at various points on an educational development continuum. This continuum shows how students can demonstrate mastery of progressively more difficult content and cognitive skills over ten incremental stages of development. Performance within each stage can be assessed by the extent to which students are meeting the standards (i.e., starting, approaching, meeting, exceeding). Performance standards include four essential elements: performance descriptors, performance levels, assessment tasks, and performance examples.



<sup>1</sup> Ouellette, M. (2000). “Maintaining progress through systemic education reform: Performance standards,” Washington, DC: National Governors Association.

The performance standards are classroom resources for voluntary use at the local level. They are not intended to replace the Illinois Learning Standards. Instead, they supplement them by providing sufficient detail and examples to enable teachers to establish appropriate grade-level performance expectations for students. The performance descriptors are a direct outgrowth of the state goals for learning. Whereas the benchmarks filled in detail on each of the standards at five grade-level clusters, the performance descriptors provide additional detail at each grade level.



### **Definitions**

**performance standards:** the knowledge and skills that students are to perform at various stages of educational development (*performance descriptors*) and the performance expectations (*performance levels and assessment tasks*) for student work (*performance exemplars*) at each of the stages.

**performance descriptors:** statements of how students can demonstrate the knowledge and skills they acquired.<sup>2</sup>

**performance levels:** descriptions of how well students have achieved the standards; that is, the range, frequency, facility, depth, creativity, and/or quality of the knowledge and skills they acquired. Students can demonstrate levels of achieving performance standards along six dimensions:

PERFORMANCE LEVEL =	RANGE +	FREQUENCY +	FACILITY +	DEPTH +	CREATIVITY +	QUALITY
Exceeding	extensively	consistently	automatically	profoundly	inventively	excellently
Meeting	fully	usually	quickly	deeply	imaginatively	well
Approaching	partially	occasionally	haltingly	cursorily	commonly	marginally
Starting	narrowly	rarely	slowly	superficially	imitatively	poorly

<sup>2</sup> New Standards. Performance Standards. (1997) Washington, DC: The National Center on Education and the Economy.

**assessment tasks:** descriptions of what students can do to demonstrate they have met the standards and a means for evaluating the levels of their performance.

**performance examples:** student work samples resulting from the classroom-based assessment tasks that illustrate performance levels.

### **Template For Expanded Performance Descriptors**

BENCHMARKS ⇒	early elementary			late elementary		middle/ junior high			early high	late high
STAGES ⇒ PERFORMANCE LEVELS ↓	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Exceeding										
Meeting										
Approaching										
Starting										

### **Vision for English Language Arts Performance**

An important aim of education from kindergarten through twelfth grade is to help every student learn to use language effectively, both as a tool for communicating and as an instrument for thinking, learning, and imagining. Guided by the **Illinois Goals and Learning Standards**, instruction in the English language arts is designed to help students become strong readers and writers, help them learn to speak and listen effectively, and help them develop skills as investigators capable of undertaking their own research.

Over the course of their schooling, students who meet the **Illinois Learning Standards** become increasingly skillful in their ability to read with understanding and fluency. By the end of twelfth grade, students who meet these standards can read relatively complex and demanding material for a variety of purposes. They can analyze new words and interpret their meanings on the basis of the components of the words themselves and the contexts in which the words appear. Students can also relate their previous knowledge to new information encountered in their reading, and they can use questions and predictions to guide their reading of particularly complex material. Their ability to read effectively includes the ability to use tables, graphs, and maps as well as text to acquire information and to evaluate arguments.

Students can also direct their reading ability to the reading and study of literature. They can analyze various elements of particular literary works, such as character, plot, conflict, theme, and setting. They can make appropriate inferences that enable them to interpret key themes in specific literary works. They can use insight gained from their reading of literature to enrich their understanding of their own cultures and individual lives, and to deepen their understanding of the cultures and individual lives of others, both past and present.

By the end of twelfth grade, students meeting the **Illinois Learning Standards** can also write and speak effectively for a range of purposes and in a variety of situations. Students can communicate information and ideas in narrative, expository, and persuasive writing, producing grammatically correct documents using available

technology. They can write effectively in a variety of academic settings and in actual, or potentially real, work-related and civic contexts. Students meeting the **Illinois Learning Standards** can also speak and listen effectively. They can comprehend and evaluate a speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages, and they can analyze and synthesize the spoken messages they hear. They can also deliver planned and impromptu presentations, use both verbal and nonverbal strategies for maintaining communication and resolving conflict, and participate effectively in discussions and collaborative work.

Finally, students who meet the **Illinois Learning Standards** can use their linguistic ability to acquire and assess information and to communicate the results of their inquiries. They can formulate a research plan, gather appropriate information, and analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the information they gather. They can communicate their findings and their own ideas effectively, supporting and defending a thesis by drawing information from appropriate sources and by offering evidence suited to the purpose and audience of the project at hand.

English language arts instruction seeks to tap the basic human capacity for learning and using language. In this key respect, the language arts are interwoven. Learning in one sphere (e.g., listening or reading) often supports learning in another (e.g., speaking or writing). People vary in the support they need as they develop specific skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. English language arts instruction must be especially attuned to providing appropriate support for students with special needs. People also vary in how they use their capacity for language, and this variation is often best understood as variation in cultural, social, and personal identity. The aim of English language arts instruction is not to eliminate or reduce the richness of linguistic diversity. Rather, the aim is to help students develop confident control over language as a powerful tool for comprehending, exploring, and communicating ideas in school and beyond, for succeeding in advanced study, for performing well in one's work, for contributing in civic and work-related arenas, and, most generally, for living a thoughtful and productive life.

### ***Progressions***

At every level, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, English language arts instruction in Illinois seeks to help students become strong readers and writers, help them learn to speak and listen effectively, and help them develop skills as investigators capable of conducting their own research. It is important to recognize that both the pace and the specific content of individual student's learning vary considerably, in part as a result of individual variation in linguistic, cognitive, and social development, and in part as a result of variation in students' broader experience with language. It is thus impossible, and in any case undesirable, to expect all students in Illinois schools to complete twelfth grade having learned to read, write, listen, and speak in precisely the same way. Nonetheless, it is possible and desirable to formulate goals, learning standards, and performance descriptors that describe common progressions of learning in the English language arts.

State-level **English Language Arts Goals** are deliberately general and thus allow for a significant range of choices in how individual school districts design and manage English language arts instruction. The goals provide broad descriptions of what students should be able to do as a result of their schooling: (1) read with understanding and fluency; (2) read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas; (3) write to communicate for a variety of purposes; (4) listen and speak effectively in a

variety of situations; and (5) use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

These goals, along with the learning standards, are meant to guide the planning of instruction and anchor the assessment of learning from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The ***Illinois English Language Arts Performance Descriptors*** are keyed to these goals and standards, and are designed to suggest appropriate levels of learning at distinct stages of a K-12 education. The performance descriptors are thus meant to provide information to teachers and students at particular levels, giving them more specific targets for instruction and learning than are provided by the overarching ***English Language Arts Goals and Standards***.

***Goal 1 – Read with understanding and fluency.*** Taken together, the K-12 performance descriptor stages suggest a general progression of learning in the area described by the goal and standard to which they pertain. With respect to the goal of learning to read with understanding and fluency, for example, the stages suggest a progression from learning distinct word analysis techniques and comprehension strategies to developing a more automatic process for using integrated strategies in comprehending, analyzing, and synthesizing information presented in increasingly complex materials.

***Goal 2 – Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas.*** With respect to reading and studying literature, learning proceeds from learning to read and respond to relatively simple stories and poems to learning to comprehend, analyze, interpret, compare, and respond to increasingly complex literary works, including works in several genres and works from a range of cultural traditions.

***Goal 3 – Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.*** In learning to write effectively, students learn to work with increasingly detailed and complex knowledge and tasks, learn to address increasingly varied audiences, and learn to manage increasingly sophisticated ways to form sentences, paragraphs, and structures for narrating, explaining, and persuading. At the same time, students learn to use the composing process with increasing sophistication as an opportunity to specify, explore, and revise their own knowledge and ideas, even as they learn to communicate more effectively the results of their thinking.

***Goal 4 – Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.*** Effective listening and speaking, the most commonly used of the language arts and therefore of central importance, develop through a progression of increasing sophistication in students' ability to sort, organize, evaluate, and present information. Inasmuch as listening, like reading, involves comprehending and interpreting meaning in the role of the "receiver" of a message or text, learning to listen effectively is related to learning to read well. Inasmuch as speaking, like writing, involves composing and presenting a message to a particular audience for a specific purpose, learning to speak effectively is also related to learning to write effectively.

***Goal 5 – Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.*** Learning to use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information represents both a distinct kind of learning and the integration of abilities involved in learning to communicate effectively through spoken and written language. Students' learning progresses from learning to plan and complete relatively simple research

projects to developing skills needed for planning more complex research projects, for gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing information from several sources, and for preparing and presenting well-focused reports, both spoken and written, for a variety of purposes and audiences.

In using the English Language Arts Goals, Standards, and Descriptor Stages, educators can establish a useful context for planning instruction by considering the learning performance expectations for stages that come before and after the stages they emphasize in their own teaching. Teachers can adjust instruction to challenge those who are "Meeting" or "Exceeding" and provide additional support for those who are functioning at "Approaching" or "Beginning" levels. By considering the performance stages for all five goals and thirteen learning standards at a given level, educators can also coordinate instruction in different areas of the English language arts so that instruction in one area supports instruction and learning in other areas.

Finally, it should be noted that the repetition of some performance standards at successive levels of learning is meant to acknowledge that effective instruction in English language arts is not simply a matter of introducing new topics at each educational level. Effective instruction is also a matter of helping students learn to apply and extend familiar concepts, techniques, and strategies in new and increasingly challenging contexts. By the same token, as some descriptor concepts, techniques, and strategies progress through the stages, they are either absorbed into other bullets or dropped altogether as the student approaches/attains final mastery. Educators working with students in the higher stages should be aware of those concepts and abilities which have been mastered in the earlier stages and plan their instruction accordingly.

***The ISBE English Language Arts Expanded Performance Descriptors:  
Intended Use and Interpretation***

When the writing team charged with developing the performance descriptors for English Language Arts met and discussed the task, we became excited about the concept of creating a document that would both enhance and expand the classroom experience for educators and students alike. To utilize the descriptors to their full potential, several key points must be addressed prior to the implementation of the changes reflected within the stages.

***Different goals receive different amounts of emphasis each year.***

It is not expected that every topic within the content area will be addressed each year. For instance, students will reach a certain depth of understanding of concepts and demonstrate certain levels of proficiency within certain stages. Thereafter, instruction should be designed to extend what students can do. This approach supports a fundamental concept of best practices: Effective teachers determine where their students are and extend their learning from that point. Even though each of the thirteen English Language Arts standards applies to all grades, emphases will vary both within and between the grade bands.

***The document is intended to be a developmental guide.***

The stages are not intended to define grade levels. It can be assumed, however, that certain stages do correspond roughly to certain grade levels (i.e., stage C to the 3<sup>rd</sup>

grade ISAT expectations, stage E to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, stage H to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, stage I to early high school, and Stage J to late high school) and the performance descriptors match the “meets” standards at those levels. The other stages **are not** meant to explicitly correspond to the missing grades between. One stage below or above may not represent one grade level below or above. Instead, they represent the developmental stages of student learning and show a progression through which students acquire an understanding of English Language Arts concepts. Consequently, it is not enough for a teacher to look at a single stage and decide what content he or she will teach at that grade level. Rather, a series of at least three stages (the prior stage, the stage at which students are functioning, and the following stage) must be considered to define the progression of understanding students should experience in order to move from one ISAT stage to the next.

***The document is a curriculum development tool.***

The stages of development presented in this document may be used by a school district to establish a curriculum that will help students meet state standards. By using the stages corresponding to ISAT, curricula can move students through the stages of development without teaching every concept every year. Taken together, the K-12 performance descriptor stages suggest a general progression of learning in the area described by the goal and standard to which they pertain. In this manner the performance descriptors are used to help *develop* a curriculum, rather than to *prescribe* a state-mandated curriculum of what should be taught at each grade. In fact, while writing the descriptors, the team worked to avoid statements that advocated certain pedagogy. Instead, statements focus on measurable student performances.

***Each stage represents growth from the previous stage.***

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***The document uses appropriate English Language Arts terminology.***

Occasionally, a reader may encounter an unfamiliar term. As a student progresses through the stages of development, it is assumed that a vocabulary shift will occur and the correct terms will be applied. In order to assist the reader with terminology used in this document, a glossary has been written with specific definitions to clarify intended meanings.

***The document is based on the current form of the state learning goals and their benchmarks.***

It is assumed that the state goals and benchmarks will undergo continual refinement, and this document will need to be revised as that happens. As such, this document should always be considered a work in progress. During their development, the performance descriptors were carefully aligned with the ***Illinois State Learning Standards*** and the ***National English Language Arts Standards***. Primarily guided by these two documents, all of the bullet points are written to indicate the "meets" level of performance for each stage and are not intended to limit instruction. Curriculum should be fluid and change as needed at local levels.