

One definition of a benchmark is “a standard or point of reference against which things may be compared or assessed...a criterion.” In educational assessment, benchmarks may be one or more standards used to group students as to degree of achievement and to identify some as being in need of special treatment. One example of a benchmark is a standard for “proficiency” in a subject being taught. A common criterion for proficiency is attainment of a test score that is at or above a target percentile rank in a reference group of students; the 40th percentile is widely used as a critical point for proficiency.

Other benchmarks may be used to identify students who fall short of the proficiency benchmark and to identify those for whom instructional intervention may be needed to help them towards the proficiency benchmark. In many educational programs, students performing below the 25th percentile may be identified as needing intervention; in some cases, those performing below the 10th percentile are considered to merit urgent intervention.

To this point, the 10th, 25th, and 40th percentile ranks have been identified as widely used criteria for placing students in a progression from needing urgent intervention to achieving target levels of proficiency. How do we know when a student is below, at, or above each of these benchmarks? The answer is “cut scores”—the actual scores on norm-referenced educational tests that distinguish each of the percentile-based reference levels. The distinction between percentile-defined benchmarks and cut scores is important because student performance generally improves as a result of the amount of effective instruction the student receives. As a result, the score that corresponds to a given percentile benchmark will generally be lower at the start of the school year and higher with each successive month, quarter, or semester; that is, cut scores for a given percentile rank can be expected to increase over the course of the school year.

The 10th, 25th, and 40th percentile ranks are the default benchmarks for some applications of Star assessments (Star users are free to substitute different percentile benchmarks and to specify additional benchmarks). The table on the following page lists, for each school grade, a number of benchmarks in addition to the 10th, 25th and 40th as a convenience to the user. For each grade and percentile benchmark, it lists the cut score—the lowest scaled score corresponding to the percentile—for each of three different months of the standard 10-month school year: the first, fifth, and ninth months (fall, winter, and spring).

Star Early Literacy Spanish Unified Benchmarks and Cut Scores^a

a. The Star Early Literacy Spanish benchmarks are based on user norms—while the Renaissance user base is large and distributed, this is not equivalent to a national norming sample. The user should take this into consideration in interpreting results.

b. Below 10 - Urgent Intervention; Below 25 - Intervention; At/Above 40 - Benchmark.

Grade	Percentile ^b	Fall (September)	Winter (January)	Spring (May)
		Unified Scaled Score		
K	10	591	628	666
	20	613	658	703
	25	624	670	716
	40	655	702	749
	50	673	720	767
	75	726	772	819
	90	763	816	868
1	10	668	697	726
	20	698	731	765
	25	708	744	779
	40	735	773	811
	50	752	790	828
	75	801	836	871
	90	845	877	909
2	10	697	710	724
	20	729	746	763
	25	742	762	782
	40	779	799	819
	50	801	820	839
	75	849	867	886
	90	888	911	933
3	10	695	701	706
	20	726	739	752
	25	738	754	770
	40	780	797	814
	50	808	823	838
	75	873	882	891
	90	925	940	954