

INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) Benchmarks were developed by principals and central office administrators from standards derived through state testing programs, TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), the use of standards in other states, and accepted research from experts in the field of education. The benchmark documents are a result of a review of this body of knowledge tempered by the experience of CPS administrators, teachers, and school councils. They will serve as an accountability tool for schools and the district. In addition, the benchmarks will help the community to understand overall student achievement and progress in closing the achievement gap in our city's schools.

The CPS Benchmarks are comprehensive including primary and secondary indicators of achievement. Primary indicators are those set by the federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Primary indicators include a standard of proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics as measured by MCAS, the Massachusetts state testing program. Secondary indicators include additional academic assessments as well as measures of school climate, family participation / satisfaction, assessments of English Language Learners, Cambridge Rindge and Latin (CRLS) graduation indicators, and competencies for Rindge School of Technical Arts (RSTA).

Benchmarks are determined for schools and the district. They are also determined for subgroups of students in order to measure the extent to which the school/ district has addressed the achievement gap. Students are categorized into subgroups as defined by the NCLB legislation and are compared against the performance of white students in order to measure achievement gaps in the same way that NCLB demands similar comparisons.

The Benchmark reports included in this document represent baseline data for the district and for each school that will serve as a comparison for future years. Annual Benchmark reports will be used in assessing student outcomes in each school and overall progress of the school system. Individual school benchmarks will be used by the school in annual school improvement planning and by the superintendent as one piece of the evaluation of principals. The district will use district benchmarks to measure: progress in overall student achievement, the extent to which progress is made in closing the achievement gap among subgroups of students, the efficacy of existing programs, and the need for revisions in the district improvement plan.

What process was used in developing the benchmarks?

Principals worked in collaboration with central office administrators in subcommittees from October 2003 through January 2004 to determine both the indicators of success and the establishment of appropriate benchmarks of progress. Feedback was solicited from staff at individual schools, school councils, and curriculum coordinators. The Office of Student Achievement and Accountability provided oversight for the process and provided updates to the School Committee. At the same time, the Management Information Systems department worked with the Student Achievement and Accountability office to begin development of a data warehouse. The ultimate goal is to provide immediate access of timely data through a data warehouse to principals and other administrators for use in planning and evaluation.

What indicators are being measured?

Academic Achievement Data

- MCAS (3-10) including alternate MCAS assessments for special education students
- Early Literacy Assessment in reading and writing (K-2)
- Developmental Reading Assessment (3-5) 2004-2005
- Report card grades (9-12); grades 6-8 (2004-2005)
- Course failure rates (9-12); grades 6-8 (2004-2005)
- SAT
- PSAT
- AP (Advanced Placement course enrollment and exam pass rates)
- Eighth grade portfolio presentations 2004-2005

School Climate Information

- Discipline report
- Attendance
- Effective School Battery results (teachers K-12, students 6-12)
- Family Surveys (K-8)
- Parent participation in Student Conferences (K-8)
- Student participation in school sponsored extra curricula activities (9-12)
- Staff participation as advisors, sponsors, coaches in extra curricula activities (9-12)

Assessments for English Language Learners

- MELA-O (English Proficiency testing for English Language Learners)
- LAS R/W (English testing in reading and writing for ELL students)
- MEPA R/W (Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment in Reading and Writing for ELL students)

RSTA Indicators

- COP - Certificate of Occupational Proficiency (RSTA seniors)
- RSTA field placement
- Career certification (RSTA)

Graduation Indicators CRLS

- MCAS Competency Determination
- Graduation rate
- Dropout rate

How will this document address the achievement gap in our schools?

Overall progress in each indicator is first reported for the aggregate (all students) within a school or in the district. Progress on each indicator is then reported for each subgroup of students. The gap between subgroups is reported if there are more than 20 students in a group for statistical purposes. The subgroups are those defined by NCLB legislation and are the same as those reported on schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports. They include:

- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- White
- Students receiving Free/ Reduced Lunch
- Special Education
- LEP (Limited English Proficient)

By looking at each school/ district report, it becomes clear where to focus improvement efforts both for all students and for targeted subgroups. The data will form the foundation of school improvement planning and will serve as a public accountability measure of progress in overall student achievement and closing the achievement gaps in our schools/ district.

How and when will this information be reported?

Annual benchmark reports will be issued for the district and each school in July and will be updated in early fall when MCAS data is received. Much of the data that informs the benchmarks is collected at the end of each school year. In the case of MCAS, data is not received until late fall. At present, data is housed in the CPS Computer Center, the CRLS Data Center, the Office of Bilingual Education and English Language Acquisition, and by the assessment specialist in the Office of Student Achievement and Accountability. The district is in the process of transferring this information into one comprehensive data warehouse.