

National Reading Program Implementation and Expansion BENCHMARKING ACTIVITY REPORT

A collaborative & policy-based process to set shared expectations that educators at all levels could use to understand where to help students' progress in their reading skills

In 2019, USAID and Malawi's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology sought to establish shared learning expectations, or "benchmarks." The process used both narrative information—performance-level descriptors (PLDs)—and numerical information—cut scores imposed on test data—to match expectations of students' learning to performance on the National Reading Assessment.

NRPIE's panel of experts met for two workshops during a two-week period. During that time, they discussed PLDs and cut scores in the context of Malawi as well as considering global best practices.

They proposed discrete PLDs for each of the assessment's 12 subtask—six from the Chichewa tool and six from the English tool—with accompanying cut scores and progressive interim targets that consider students standard and the NRP year of implementation.

Key findings from this process are shared in the hopes of informing the final approval of the PLDs and cut scores.

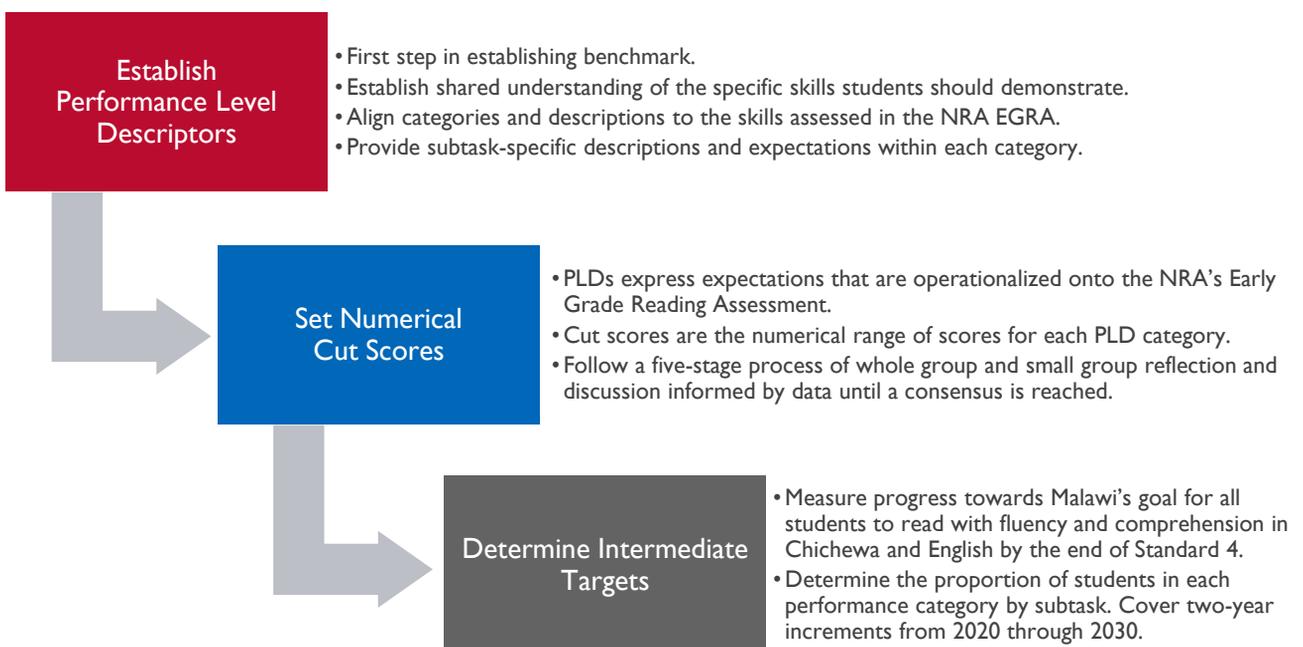
The panelists

Recommendations in this report combine student data from Malawi's National Reading Assessments with the experience of a diverse group of 30 expert panelists representing

- ❑ USAID/Malawi
- ❑ Yesani Ophunzira Activity and Reading for All Malawi
- ❑ Malawi Institute of Education
- ❑ Directorate of Inspection and Advisory
- ❑ MoEST departments
- ❑ Teacher Training Colleges
- ❑ Primary School Teachers

The group employed the Angoff method to establish cut scores based on students' performance on the NRA's Early Grade Reading Assessment. This method differs from past benchmarking attempts in Malawi that relied exclusively on statistical approaches.

PROCESS OVERVIEW



Performance Level Descriptors & Cut Scores

DECIPHERING THE CHART

Subtasks	PLD	Nonreader	Pre-reader	Emerging reader	Progressing reader	Proficient reader	Exceed expectations reader
Letter name identification (Standards 1–4)	When given the NRA grid of 100 letters, learners can...in one minute	not identify any letters.	identify very few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify a few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify some upper- and lowercase letters.	identify most upper- and lowercase letters.	identify all upper- and lowercase letters.
Subtask and standards PLD applies to	Description of subtask	0 CLNPM	1–14 CLNPM	15–29 CLNPM	30–49 CLNPM	50–69 CLNPM	70+ CLNPM

Performance level categories

Performance level description of expectations

Numerical cut scores

CHICHEWA Assessment

Subtasks	PLD	Nonreader	Pre-reader	Emerging reader	Progressing reader	Proficient reader	Exceed expectations reader
Letter name identification (Standards 1–4)	When given the NRA grid of 100 letters, learners can...in one minute	not identify any letters.	identify very few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify a few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify some upper- and lowercase letters.	identify most upper- and lowercase letters.	identify all upper- and lowercase letters.
		0 CLNPM	1–14 CLNPM	15–29 CLNPM	30–49 CLNPM	50–69 CLNPM	70+ CLNPM
Syllable Reading (Standards 1–4)	When given the NRA grid of 100 syllables, learners can...in one minute	not read any syllables.	read very few syllables.	read a few syllables.	read some syllables.	read most syllables.	read all or almost all syllables.
		0 CSSPM	1–9 CSSPM	10–19 CSSPM	20–39 CSSPM	40–59 CSSPM	60+ CSSPM
Familiar Word Reading (Standards 2–4)	When given the NRA list of 50 familiar words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words.	read very few words.	read a few words.	read some words.	read most words.	read all or almost all words.
		0 CFWPM	1–5 CFWPM	6–15 CFWPM	16–29 CFWPM	30–39 CFWPM	40+ CFWPM
Oral Reading Fluency (Standards 1–2)	When given the NRA oral reading passage with 54 words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words in the text.	read aloud a few words in the text.	read aloud some words, with errors, at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud most words in the text, with some errors, at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with some errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with few or no errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports full understanding.
		0 CWPM	1–5 CWPM	6–10 CWPM	11–19 CWPM	20–29 CWPM	30+ CWPM
Reading Comprehension (Standards 1–2)	When asked five questions about the NRA oral reading passage, learners can...	not answer any questions about the text	not answer any questions about the text	not answer any questions about the text	answer questions about the setting or characters.	retrieve prominent explicit information from one single and two consecutive sentences.	retrieve information from one single and two consecutive sentences to make inferences about events, characters, and ideas.
		0 questions correct	0 questions correct	0 questions correct	1 question correct	2 questions correct	3–5 questions correct
Oral Reading Fluency (Standards 3–4)	When given the NRA oral reading passage with 54 words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words in the text.	read aloud a few words in the text.	read aloud some words, with errors, at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud most words in the text, with some errors, at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with some errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with few or no errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports full understanding.
		0 CWPM	1–9 CWPM	10–25 CWPM	26–50 CWPM	51–59 CWPM	60+ CWPM
Reading Comprehension (Standards 3–4)	When asked five questions about the NRA oral reading passage, learners can...	not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	retrieve prominent explicit information from one single and two consecutive sentences when the information is easy to locate.	retrieve information from one single and two consecutive sentences about events and characters.	retrieve information from one single and two consecutive sentences to make simple inferences about events, characters, ideas.	retrieve information from the whole text and make simple and complex inferences about events, characters, and ideas.
		0 questions correct	0 questions correct	1–2 questions correct	3 questions correct	4 questions correct	5 questions correct
Listening Comprehension (Standards 1–4)	When listening to the NRA text and five questions, learners can...	not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	retrieve some information about the main events or characters to answer explicit questions.	retrieve some information about the main events or characters and make simple inferences.	retrieve information about main events, ideas, and main characters to answer explicit and inferential questions.	
		0–1 question correct	2 questions correct	2 questions correct	3–4 questions correct	5 questions correct	

Developing listening skills

Emerging comprehender

Progressing comprehender

Proficient comprehender

Performance level descriptors and cut scores are specific to each language and subtask. Some are further segmented by standard.

ENGLISH Assessment

Subtasks	PLD	Nonreader	Pre-reader	Emerging reader	Progressing reader	Proficient reader	Exceed expectations reader
Letter name identification (Standards 2–4)	When given the NRA grid of 100 letters, learners can...in one minute	not identify any letters.	identify very few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify a few upper- and lowercase letters.	identify some upper- and lowercase letters.	identify most upper- and lowercase letters.	identify all upper- and lowercase letters.
		0 CLNPM	1–9 CLNPM	10–25 CLNPM	26–44 CLNPM	45–59 CLNPM	60+ CLNPM
Letter sound identification (Standards 2–4)	When given the NRA grid of 100 syllables, learners can...in one minute	not say any sounds of the letters.	say the sounds of very few letters.	say the sounds of a few letters.	say the sounds of some letters.	say the sounds of most letters.	say the sounds of all letters.
		0 CLSPM	1–9 CLSPM	10–25 CLSPM	26–44 CLSPM	45–59 CLSPM	60+ CLSPM
Familiar Word Reading (Standard 2)	When given the NRA list of 50 familiar words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words.	read very few words.	read a few words.	read some words.	read most words.	read all or almost all words.
		0 CFWPM	1–4 CFWPM	5–9 CFWPM	10–14 CFWPM	15–24 CFWPM	25+ CFWPM
Oral Reading Fluency (Standard 2)	When given the NRA oral reading passage with 47 words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words in the text.	read aloud a few words in the text.	read some words in the text.	read aloud most words.	read aloud most words in the text, with some errors, at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with some errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports understanding.
		0 CWPM	1–5 CWPM	6–15 CWPM	16–28 CWPM	29–40 CWPM	41+ CWPM
Reading Comprehension (Standard 2)	When asked six questions about the NRA oral reading passage, learners can...	not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	answer questions about the setting or characters.	retrieve prominent explicit information from a single and two consecutive sentences.	retrieve information from one or two consecutive sentences to make inferences about events, characters, and ideas.
		0 questions correct	0 questions correct	1 question correct	1 question correct	2–3 questions correct	4–5 questions correct
Familiar Word Reading (Standards 3–4)	When given the NRA list of 50 familiar words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words.	read very few words.	read a few words.	read some words.	read most words.	read all or almost all words.
		0 CFWPM	1–4 CFWPM	5–14 CFWPM	15–24 CFWPM	25–34 CFWPM	35+ CFWPM
Oral Reading Fluency (Standards 3–4)	When given the NRA oral reading passage with 47 words, learners can...in one minute	not read any words in the text.	read aloud a few words in the text.	read aloud some words, with errors, but at a pace that still supports understanding.	read aloud most words in the text, with some errors, but at a pace that supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with some errors, at a pace and accuracy level that still supports understanding.	read aloud the whole passage, with few or no errors, at a pace and accuracy level that supports full understanding.
		0 CWPM	1–9 CWPM	10–25 CWPM	26–43 CWPM	44–55 CWPM	56+ CWPM
Reading Comprehension (Standards 3–4)	When asked six questions about the NRA oral reading passage, learners can...	not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	retrieve explicit information from a single sentence.	retrieve explicit information from across sentences.	retrieve information from one or two consecutive sentences to make simple inferences about events, characters, ideas.	retrieve information from the whole text and make simple and complex inferences about events, characters, and ideas.
		0 questions correct	0 questions correct	1 question correct	2–3 questions correct	4 questions correct	5 questions correct
Listening Comprehension (Standards 2–4)	When listening to the NRA text and five questions, learners can...	Developing listening skills		Emerging comprehender	Progressing comprehender	Proficient comprehender	
		not answer any questions about the text.	not answer any questions about the text.	retrieve some information about the main events or characters to answer explicit questions.	retrieve some information about the main events or characters and make simple inferences.	retrieve information about main events, ideas, and main characters to answer explicit and inferential questions.	
		0 questions correct	0 questions correct	1 question correct	2 questions correct	3+ questions correct	

Determining INTERMEDIATE TARGETS

Target setting is the last step in a benchmarking process, as it uses the PLDs and cut scores to determine the proportion of students who should be progressing through each stage to meet national goals in future years.

1

Set targets for two-year increments for 2020–30. 2020 are expectations based on 2018 results but targets for 2022 and beyond are based on aspirational hopes.

2

Standard 2 and 4 targets based on student data from past administration. Standard 1 and 3 calculated based on linear progression model.

3

Panelists used targets to help differentiate expectations for students at different standard levels based on the skill progression in the curriculum.

4

The overall aim expressed through the targets is to reduce and eliminate any students unable to answer any items correctly (“nonreaders”)

Application and Alignment GLOBAL PROFICIENCY FRAMEWORK

“If a student did well on a subtask, would it indicate they are proficient at the skill as outlined in the Global Proficiency Framework?”

- ❑ Determine the extent to which PLDs match the Global Proficiency Framework’s categories for learners: does not meet global minimum proficiency, partially meets proficiency, meets proficiency, exceeds global minimum proficiency
- ❑ Map the Global Proficiency Framework’s skills descriptions to the skills measured by NRA EGRA subtasks
- ❑ Panelists raise questions about whether proficiency standards should apply to students in their primary or secondary language of instruction, as Malawi employs both Chichewa and English

Panelists determined that the current tools were inadequate to understand how well Malawian students are doing against global expectations.

Key Learnings & RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS



Benchmarking and the Global Proficiency Framework highlighted a disconnect between current curricula and global expectations.



A review of National Reading Assessment’s EGRA tools led to recommendations to update subtasks in both languages.



Panelists identified a misalignment between the classroom-based continuous assessment and other national assessments.