



WHITEPAPER

Understanding New National Norms



Why New Norms Now?

Today, the national norms in use by all major assessment providers are drawn from pre-pandemic data. While four- or five-year-old data might be reasonable in normal times, relying exclusively on pre-pandemic data to measure “normal” makes little sense for educators in 2024. A critical mass of research has shown that the current state of student performance has shifted, and norms based on pre-pandemic performance do not reflect that shift.

In summer 2024, *i-Ready* will introduce new national norms based on a large, nationally representative, post-pandemic dataset. These new national norms will more accurately reflect the realities of post-pandemic classrooms. *i-Ready's* new national norms will be based on a sampling of more than 11 million students who took the *i-Ready Diagnostic* during the 2022–2023 school year. To provide a complete picture of student performance across the United States, Curriculum Associates approximated the US Grades K–8 public school population on geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic status as represented by the National Center for Education Statistics. These new national norms will provide an understanding of student performance on the *i-Ready Diagnostic* relative to a nationally representative student group.



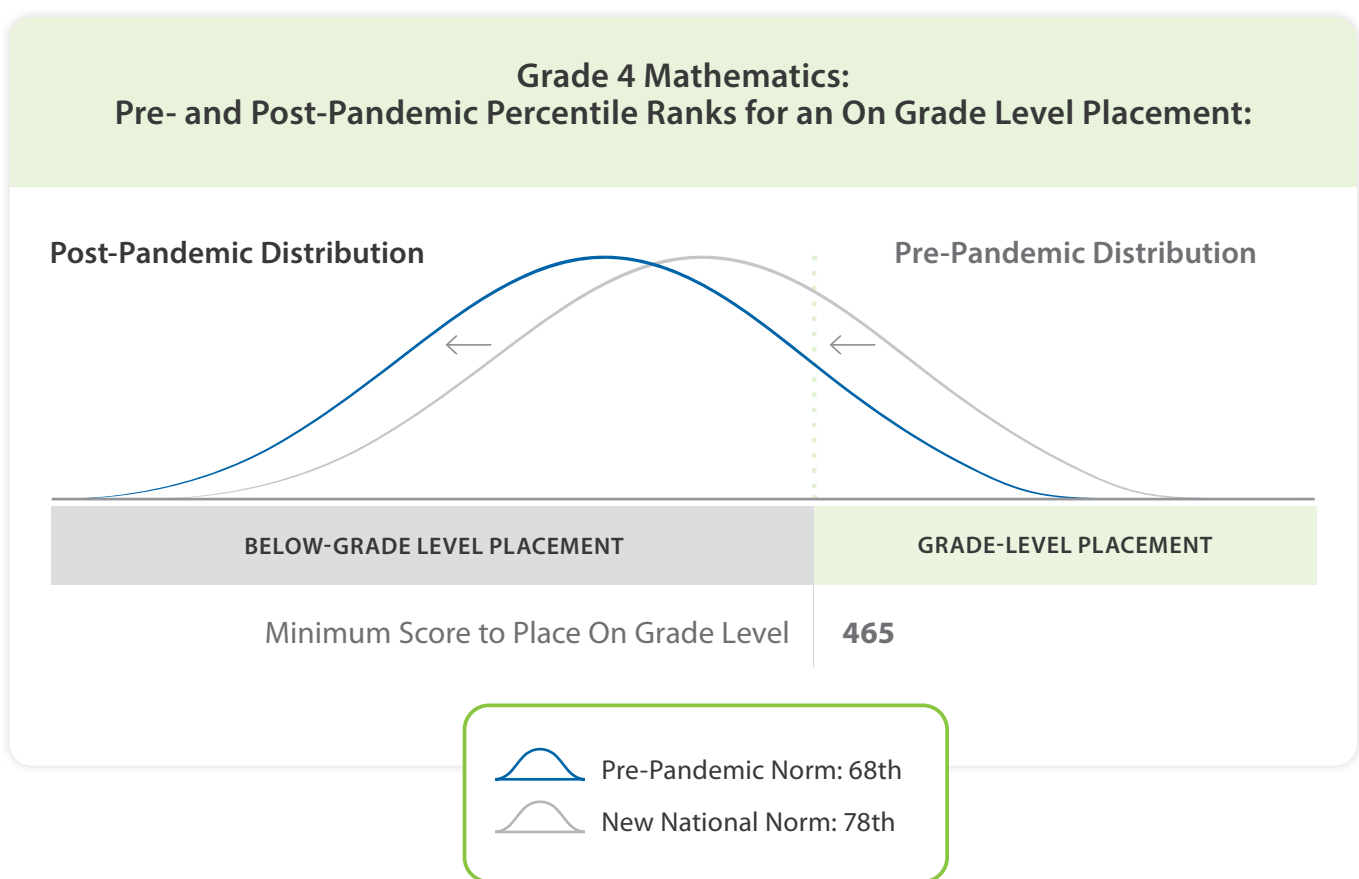
Reflecting Reality

New *i-Ready* national norms will reflect the realities explained in the [State of Student Learning](#), published by the Curriculum Associates Research team in 2022 and 2023. This research provides a detailed portrait of Grades K–8 performance in American schools. The pattern uncovered in the [State of Student Learning](#) largely reflects what educators learned from National Assessment of Educational Progress data in the [Nation's Report Card](#) in 2022, as well as recent research into the [stalled post-pandemic recovery from NWEA](#).

What Do New National Norms Tell Us about Student Performance?

Updated *i-Ready* national norms will reflect the pattern seen in the research: Large numbers of students are still recovering from interruptions to their learning, and fewer students are placing on grade level. While not categorical, this trend persists in both Reading and Mathematics and cuts across Grades K–8.

One example typifying the shift in performance follows below, comparing the minimum scale score for an On Grade Level placement in Grade 4 Mathematics alongside the associated percentile ranks for that score using both pre- and post-pandemic norms.



In this example, and numerous others, the same student score of 465 will be associated with a higher percentile rank using new norms. The set of skills the score represents hasn't changed, but given the shift in the national norm or the new "curve," the student's performance ranks higher relative to their peers.

What Do Recent State Summative Results Tell Us about Student Performance?

The shift we observe in new *i-Ready* national norms is also evident in recent state summative tests. While a typical state summative test is not nationally normed, these tests do have widespread participation that can serve as a reasonable approximation of the student performance in a given state. Looking at results from recent state tests, we see a similar pattern—students will receive a higher percentile rank for a given score on a state test.

GEORGIA: GRADE 4 READING		
Achievement Level	2019	2023
Minimum “Developing” Score	25th Percentile	32nd Percentile
Minimum “Proficient” Score	58th Percentile	64th Percentile

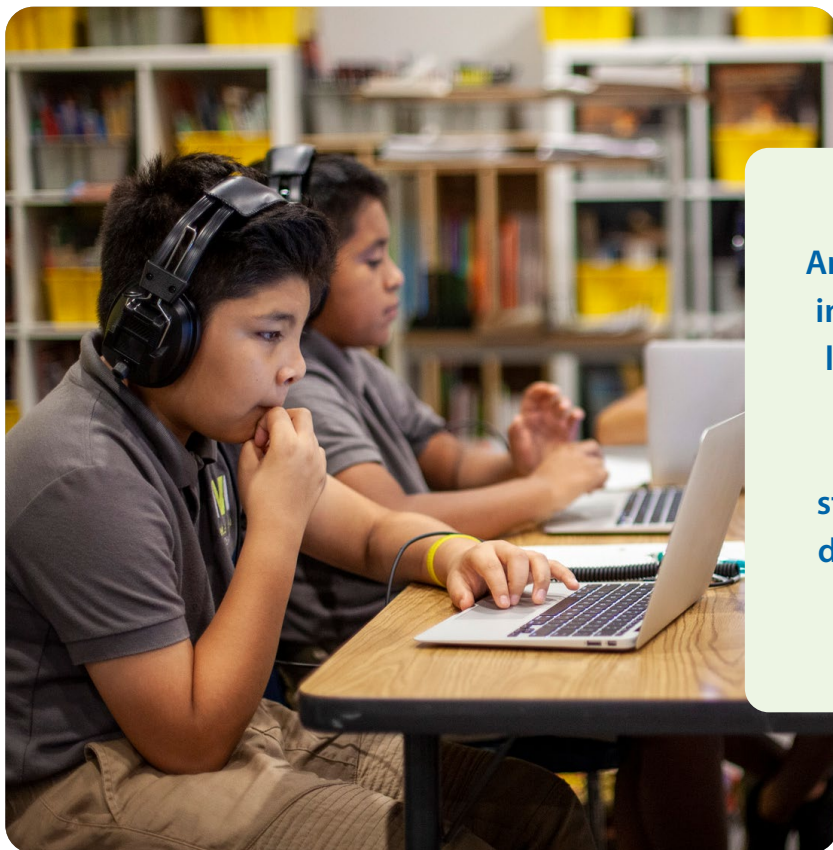
TEXAS: GRADE 5 MATHEMATICS		
Achievement Level	2019	2022
Minimum “Approaches” Score	18th Percentile	34th Percentile
Minimum “Meets” Score	48th Percentile	61st Percentile

CALIFORNIA: GRADE 4 MATHEMATICS		
Achievement Level	2019	2022
Minimum “Standard Nearly Met” Score	25th Percentile	33rd Percentile
Minimum “Standard Met” Score	55th Percentile	62nd Percentile

Each of these examples illustrate the same trend: As students and educators have trouble with recouping unfinished learning, students are generally placing lower on state summative tests. While the student skills needed to obtain a particular score hasn’t changed, a score that was previously associated with a lower percentile rank will now be associated with a higher percentile rank because the collective distribution of student performance trends lower.

Does Updating National Norms Run the Risk of Lowering Student Expectations?

Educators and assessment providers have raised one concern as they weigh the decision to update national norms: If we update norms now, when scores are still lagging, won't we be inadvertently lowering student expectations? While the question raises an important concern, it is only problematic if normative measures are used as the primary benchmark for student performance.



Anchoring student expectations in criterion-referenced metrics, like *i-Ready Diagnostic Grade-Level Placements*, enables educators to maintain high standards and ambitious goals despite the troubling trend we observe in normative data.

By using criterion-referenced measures as our primary metric for student achievement—like the criterion-referenced benchmarks used in all the state test examples above—educators can anchor student expectations on grade-level proficiency for every learner. Normative data are valuable, as they can tell us about the student population relative to these expectations, but a norm isn't designed to set the standard for grade-level achievement. Anchoring student expectations in criterion-referenced metrics, like *i-Ready Diagnostic Grade-Level Placements*, enables educators to maintain high standards and ambitious goals despite the troubling trend we observe in normative data.

What Decisions Will New Norms Influence?

As the reality of a shifting norm sinks in, educators are quickly moving to questions about the practical applicability of new national norms. What does a change in norms mean for the decisions we make as we run school systems and teach students? From our early conversations with educators, the answers to that question vary widely. A few questions to help district leaders get started follow below.

- **Where** do we use norms to make decisions today?
- **What** norm-based decisions do we need to re-evaluate?
- **Where** should criterion-referenced scores play a bigger role in our decisions?

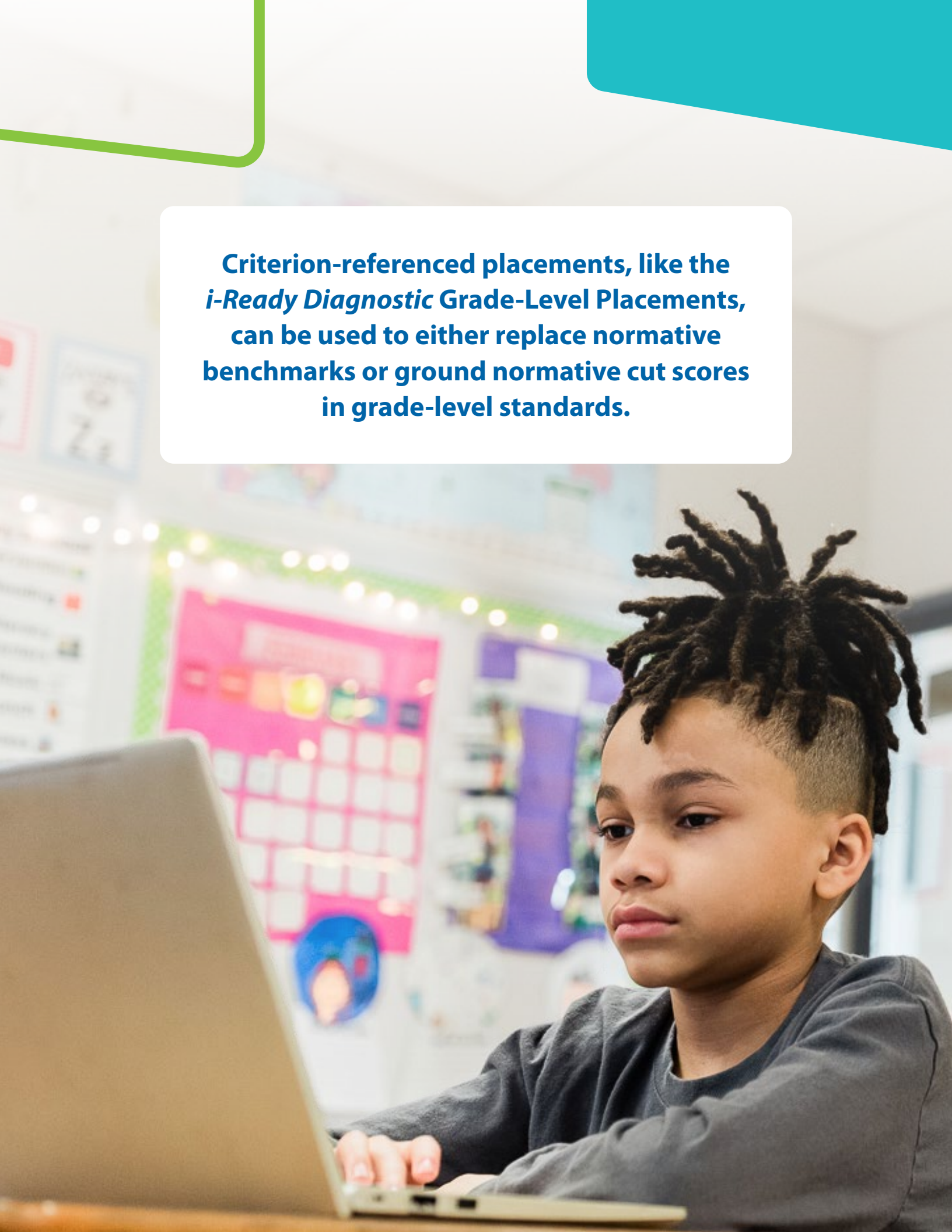
Answers to the first question are particularly wide-ranging: identifying students for intervention programs, targeting extra support, placing students in small groups, preliminary screening for special education evaluation, placing students in accelerated courses, identifying gifted and talented students. The list is long, varied, and local.

Normative measures were likely never ideal for making these decisions. To answer these questions, we would ideally ground our metrics in students' skills. For example, if a cutoff for algebra placement was set at the 85th percentile, that cut score has little to do with students' mastery of the skills that prepare them for success in algebra. Similarly, if students below the 25th percentile receive additional support in early reading, educators might over- or under-identify students who could benefit from additional support. In each of these cases, criterion-referenced benchmarks, or criterion-referenced measures alongside normative measures, provide more complete and more stable criteria for making decisions.

As a starting point, the *i-Ready* team recommends identifying all the places where norms are used for instructional decisions today and evaluating if a shift in norms could meaningfully impact students moving forward. In any case where the answer is yes, educators will need to look across old and new norms to re-evaluate cut scores and benchmarks. Alternatively, criterion-referenced placements, like the *i-Ready Diagnostic Grade-Level Placements*, can be used to either replace normative benchmarks or ground normative cut scores in grade-level standards.



For more detailed information on the new *i-Ready* national norms, please see our [National Norms](#) page.



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