Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment: Key Messages and Talking Points

Key Message 1: Vision for Student Success and Updated Standards

- **Future Readiness:** Iowa is committed to preparing all students for future success, including postsecondary education and the workforce.
- **Critical Thinking Skills:** All students need the knowledge and skills to think critically and solve complex problems to make informed choices and take advantage of future opportunities.
- **High Expectations:** Iowa's Academic Standards establish the grade-level academic knowledge and skills students are expected to develop to support future success.
- **2024 Standards Update:** The State Board of Education adopted updated Iowa Academic Standards in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics in 2024, which schools first implemented during the 2024-25 school year.

Key Message 2: Transition from ISASP to Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment

- **Need for Alignment:** Adopting updated academic standards created the need for a new state assessment aligned to what students are expected to know and be able to do.
- **New State Assessment:** The Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment replaced the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) in English language arts and mathematics, with students taking the new test for the first time in spring 2026.
- **Iowa-Developed:** Iowa Testing Programs at the University of Iowa developed the assessment.
- **Tested Grades and Subjects:** Students in grades 3-11 took ELA and mathematics assessments in spring 2026, while students in grades 5, 8, and 10 took science assessments. Beginning in spring 2027, science assessments will be administered in grades 5, 8, and 11.
- **Classroom Connection:** The Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment measures student achievement relative to Iowa's updated academic standards, better reflecting what students are expected to learn in Iowa classrooms.

Key Message 3: New Achievement Levels and Educator Involvement

- **Four Performance Levels:** Student performance on the Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment is reported across four achievement levels—Below, Approaching, Meeting, and Exceeding Grade-Level Expectations—replacing the three levels used on the previous ISASP (Not-Yet Proficient, Proficient, Advanced).

- **More Granular Detail:** Moving to four achievement levels provides a more detailed picture of where a student's performance falls on the continuum of grade-level expectations, identifying which students are meeting expectations and which need additional support.

- **Iowa Educator-Led Cut Scores:** The new achievement levels were developed through a rigorous, research-based standard-setting process. In June 2026, a committee of 155 Iowa educators met for five days to recommend the cut scores that establish the score ranges for each of the four levels.

Key Message 4: Interpreting the New Baseline and Using Results

- **Setting a New Baseline:** Because the Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment aligns to updated academic standards and features new assessment content, questions, achievement levels, and cut scores, spring 2026 results establish a new baseline for measuring future student achievement.

- **Results Are Not Directly Comparable:** The Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment results should not be directly compared to prior ISASP scores. Differences between the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment and those previously identified as proficient or advanced on ISASP do not necessarily indicate an improvement or decline in student learning. Some students previously classified as proficient on ISASP may now be classified as Approaching Grade-Level Expectations on the Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment. This does not necessarily mean students have lost knowledge or skills.

- **One Measure for Action:** The Iowa Learning Expectations and Academic Development Assessment is one measure that helps teachers understand where students are succeeding and where they need support, informs parents and communities, guides classroom instruction, assists schools in improvement planning, and informs Iowa's federal school accountability system.

For more information, visit the Iowa Department of Education Student Assessment webpage for additional resources.