

Pathways of Progress™

Highly Skilled Learner Criteria and Description

updated January 28, 2020

Highly Skilled Learners are students who are solidly on track in learning basic early literacy and reading skills and are very likely to stay on track in the following year. The Highly Skilled Learners criteria in Table 1 are based upon end-of-year reading expectations for each grade level. Values in bold correspond to above-benchmark performance at the 60th percentile or higher using Acadience™ Reading K–6 National Norms; values in italic correspond to performance at or above the benchmark goal for each grade level.

In our analysis, students who met the Highly Skilled Learner criteria at the end of one school year had the following outcomes at the end of the next school year (averaged across grades; exact percentages varied somewhat by grade):

- 69% earned scores at or above the 80th percentile the following year,
- 70% met the Highly Skilled Learner criteria the following year,
- 91% earned scores in the Above Benchmark range (60th percentile or higher) the following year, and
- 99% earned scores in the At or Above Benchmark range the following year.

These percentages are consistent even if the student met the Highly Skilled Learner criteria at the end of the year and had made Below Typical or Well Below Typical progress (Pathways 1 or 2) over the course of the year. Consequently, for the purpose of summarizing the number of students who have made adequate progress, students who meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria will be assigned to Pathway 3 (Typical Progress) or higher at the end of the year. For example, if a student who is a Highly Skilled Learner is on the Below Typical Progress Pathway (Pathway 2) at the end of the year, he or she will be assigned to Pathway 3 for reporting purposes. If a student who is a Highly Skilled Learner achieves Above Typical Progress (Pathway 4) or Well Above Typical Progress (Pathway 5), then no changes will be made to their Pathway for reporting purposes.

For some students who meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria, it may be appropriate to shift instructional emphasis to more advanced skills in the scope and sequence of basic early literacy and reading skills—and potentially to skills above their grade placement. For example, kindergarten students who meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria and have very high skills in phonemic awareness and basic phonics may benefit more from an instructional emphasis on advanced decoding and overall reading proficiency instead of continued emphasis on phonemic awareness and basic phonics. Likewise, for students in first grade and above who meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria and have high levels of text-reading proficiency (i.e., reading for meaning, at an adequate rate, with a high degree of accuracy), it may be more valuable to invest instructional time in applying their reading skills to more advanced or challenging reading materials (e.g., above-grade level texts) rather than focusing on further improvements in reading grade-level text.

For students in grades 3-6 who meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria, it may be especially important to shift the instructional emphasis from further building their reading proficiency to investing instructional time in using their high levels of reading proficiency to build their knowledge of other content areas. We recommend that these decisions involve teacher judgment and consideration of the pattern of student scores and performance in other domains.

Highly Skilled Learners are those students in grades K–6 whose Acadience Reading benchmark scores are all equal to or higher than the scores reported in Table 1. A student must meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria for *each measure* listed in the table below, for the grade in question, in order to meet the Highly Skilled Learners criteria. These Highly Skilled Learner criteria apply to the 2019–2020 school year. In subsequent years, Highly Skilled Learner criteria may change based on updated research.

For grades K–1, students may meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria only at the end of the year, because the measures and the composite score change during the course of the year. For grade 2, students may meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria at the middle or end of the year (but not at the beginning of the year), because the measures and composite score remain consistent between the middle and end of the year. For grades 3 – 6, students may meet the Highly Skilled Learner criteria at the beginning, middle, or end of the year, because the measures and composite score remain consistent over the year.

Table 1. *Acadience Reading Scores for Highly Skilled Learner Criteria for 2018 - 2019*

Grade	RCS	PSF	NWF CLS	NWF WWR	ORF	Accuracy	Retell	Maze
K	152	<i>40</i>	40	4	-	-	-	-
1	208	-	<i>58</i>	<i>13</i>	67	97	<i>15</i>	-
2	287	-	-	-	104	99	<i>27</i>	-
3	405	-	-	-	118	<i>97</i>	<i>30</i>	23
4	446	-	-	-	133	<i>98</i>	<i>33</i>	28
5	466	-	-	-	143	<i>99</i>	<i>36</i>	28
6	478	-	-	-	151	<i>98</i>	<i>32</i>	30

Note. The criteria are subject to change from year to year. RCS = Reading Composite Score; PSF = Phoneme Segmentation Fluency; NWF CLS = Nonsense Word Fluency Correct Letter Sounds; NWF WWR = Nonsense Word Fluency Whole Words Read; ORF = Oral Reading Fluency Words Correct. Values in bold correspond to performance at or above the 60th percentile using national norms. Values in italic correspond to performance at or above the benchmark goal for the grade level. For the Highly Skilled Learner criteria for prior years, e-mail info@acadiencelarning.org.