

# Elementary Grading and Assessment Handbook

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## Standards-Based Grading Timeline

**Sept. 2017-** planning for SBG

**Oct. 2017** – formation of a Report Card Committee representing all elementary schools in district as well as grade levels K-5.

**Nov. 2017-** research SBG, compare local report cards, select standards and draft new report cards

**Dec. 2017-** preliminary training to all K-5 teachers

**Jan- March 2018-** preliminary training to parents

**May 2018-** BOE approval

**Sept. 2018-** Full implementation of SBG K-2

# Why Standards-Based Grading and Reporting?

## SECTION ONE FOLLOW UP

As instructional research based strategies have evolved in schools, our traditional grading system no longer aligns with classroom instructional practices. A standards based grading and reporting system allows teachers to more accurately and consistently report student achievement to students and parents relative to state and local learning standards. A standards based grading system focuses on student learning as opposed to the earning of points. In a standards based grading classroom, student work is evaluated as evidence of learning. Teachers and students use established criteria to determine what level of learning is evident from the artifact (work) student produces. Variables other than evidence of learning, are not included in the final grade mark assigned to a student.

Grades are the ultimate form of feedback to a student about their progress towards mastery of the standards. Grade marks need to be accurate and meaningful so that parents know exactly what their child has learned and what opportunities there are for growth. Providing feedback to students around specific learning standards accompanied with formative assessment strategies has shown to significantly boost achievement and motivation for students.

**“A grade should give as clear a measure as possible of the best a student can do. Too often, grades reflect an unknown mixture of multiple factors... Unless teachers throughout a school or district completely agree on the elements and factor them into their grading in consistent ways, the meaning of grades will vary from classroom to classroom, school to school.”**

**Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006**

## Defining Purpose

### A Grade is:

*A symbol, word, or numeral that teachers assign to evidence of student learning to signify different levels of achievement towards mastery of content knowledge and skills application.*

### The Purpose of Grading:

*The purpose of **grading** is to provide feedback to students and communicate to all stakeholders, student achievement toward specific standards.*

### The Purpose of the Report Card:

*The purpose of this **report card** is to provide information regarding your student's current progress towards meeting grade level learning targets.*

It is important to have a defined **mindset** when thinking about **Standards Based Grading**. This mindset drives the decisions we make and the structure of our grading system. The following statements guide our mindset:

- ALL students will learn.
- Students learn at different rates in different ways.
- Effective feedback for students and parents is specific, actionable, and accurate.

## SECTION THREE

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

1. Grades should only be based on **clearly defined standards and learning goals** that are found within the district approved curriculum map and companion documents
2. Student evidence (work products and/or assessments) will be evaluated based on district defined **proficiency levels/performance levels** as opposed to a traditional point accumulation system and 100 point scale.
3. Evidence used for grading should be **valid** and should **represent what a student knows or can do/apply** in a specific course.
4. Students should be given **feedback** throughout the learning cycle but only assessed after the learning has occurred.

Students should have the opportunity to demonstrate additional learning and understanding through both reassessment and resubmission. Departments will create reassessment/resubmission policies.

5. The **most recent scores**, within a standard, should be used to calculate overall grade. Final grades should not be an average of all evidence as the most recent score should carry the most weight. The most recent scores should represent the student's **level of mastery** at, or close to, the

time of reporting.

6. Achievement (product criteria) and other factors (behaviors / process criteria) will be reported **separately**.

## SECTION FOUR

### GRADES DEFINED

In a standards based classroom there should be a complete separation of reporting information of content mastery (academic indicators) and the reporting of behaviors or learner characteristics (non-academic indicators). While all teachers and parents value learner characteristics/behaviors, these should not be included as part of the academic grade and/or should not influence the overall calculation of the academic grade but rather should be reported separately on the report card. Learner characteristics will be reported at the end of each quarter.

**This practice aligns with our definition of an academic grade simply communicating content mastery or skill acquisition in the areas of academics.**

#### **What can parents expect?**

You will begin to see student work that is graded on a 4 point scale rather than points possible or a letter grade.

The 4 point scale represents the following levels of mastery:

- 1- Even with support the student is struggling to master the skill
- 2- With support the student is able to show mastery
- 3- **The student can independently demonstrate mastery**
- 4- The student independently applies the skill at a deeper, more complex level than expected



You will see a separate grade for the process skills (behavior and learner characteristics)

### **How do I know what the ratings mean?**

Often when work comes home, it will be accompanied by a rubric that defines the ratings.

## **SECTION FIVE**

### **Common Terms Defined**

**Assessment:** Gathering and interpreting information about what students know and can do using a variety of tools.

**Benchmark Assessment:** An assessment that measures a student's achievement level on standards in a course that will be repeated periodically to check for improvement.

**Common Assessment:** The same assessment that is given and graded by common grade level/subject classrooms at about the same time to collect data.

**Formative Assessment:** Periodic assessment tool for learning that is used to adjust instruction for individual students or a whole class.

**Grade:** A simple, clear, and concrete summary representation of student achievement based on what a student knows at the end of a given time period. The number (or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance.

**Proficiency/Mastery:** Demonstration of student performance against standard criteria at a pre-established level.

**Targets/Skill statements:** Specific statement that describes what and/or how well students are expected to understand and perform.

**Standards-based Grading:** Achievement level based on mastery of essential standards—a grading system where scores denote progress toward the understanding of a specific target/standard.

**Summative Assessment:** An evaluation tool designed to show information about a student's achievement at the end of a period of instruction.

### **What does this change mean?**

- Traditional letter grades often include aspects of student effort and behavior. Now student performance will always be reported separately from effort and behavior.
- Traditional letter grades were calculated by averaging student performance on a variety of tasks covering a variety of skills. Now students will be assessed on skills separately and their performance will be reported for each standard.
- In traditional grading, there was often a discrepancy among the way grades were calculated. Some grades included just quizzes and tests, while others included more homework and projects. Now student ratings will be always based on their ability to demonstrate proficiency on specific learning targets.

### **What will this do for my child?**

- Your child will know what is expected in his/her learning and how he/she can demonstrate mastery.

- Your child will know his/her strengths and areas for improvement.
- Your child will receive multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of a learning target and will not be penalized for starting with no mastery.
- With a shift of focus from ***grades and how much an assignment is worth*** to ***learning and mastering content*** , students are freer to take educational risks as they learn and practice.

### **How can I help my child?**

- You are an important part of your child's education and it is important for you to talk to your child regularly about school.
- Rather than asking what grade he/she is getting in class, ask which skills he/she is working on.
- Be sure to ask the teacher when you have questions.

# STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Q.** What is a standards-based report card, and how is it different from a traditional report card?  
**A.** A standards-based report card provides specific, individualized feedback in regard to what a child should know and be able to do in all subjects at his/her grade level. On a standards-based report card, each subject area is divided into a list of skills students are expected to master. Students receive a number grade (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1) for each skill based on his/her proficiency toward a standard. On a traditional report card, students receive one letter grade for each subject area. A standards-based report card provides more information.
  
2. **Q.** Are the numbers 4, 3, 2, and 1 just another way of showing that a student earned the letter grade A, B, C, or D?  
**A.** No. Students earn a 4, 3, 2, or 1 based on very clear and specific expectations and his/her mastery of particular grade level standards. A 4 would indicate that the student's proficiency exceeded the standard. A 3 would indicate that the student is academically developing appropriately and that his/her comprehension met the standard. A 2 would indicate that the student is beginning to develop academically and that his/her understanding approached the standard. Lastly, a 1 would indicate that the student needs to develop academically and that his/her performance did not yet meet the standard. The letter grades A, B, C, or D is an average of points earned on tests, quizzes, classwork, homework, and other tasks. However, the letter grades do not show what the student has really learned or how well the student is progressing towards achieving grade-level standards.
  
3. **Q.** How will teachers know when a student has mastered a standard?  
**A.** Teachers will determine a student's mastery based on his/her performance on daily assignments and assessments given throughout each marking period.
  
4. **Q.** Will quarterly reporting (4 times per year) still be used with the shift to standards-based reports cards?  
**A.** No, quarterly reporting will not be used with the shift to standards-based report cards. Trimester reporting (3 times per year) will be used, and students will receive 3 report cards during the school year. Trimester 1 will end in December. Trimester 2 will end in March, and trimester 3 will end in June. A progress report will be generated mid-trimester in October, January and May. Trimesters will provide additional time during the school year for students to master grade level standards.

5. **Q.** What happens if a skill is only taught during one trimester and the student does not successfully meet the expectation?

**A.** In some cases, a standard will be covered during one trimester. An area for a particular standard will be shaded if the standard was not covered during the given period of time. If the student does not meet the standard by the end of the trimester, then the teacher will continue to work with the student on the specific standard by providing additional instruction or supports.

6. **Q.** My child is academically strong. How will standards-based grading challenge him/her?

**A.** Through standards-based instructional methods of pre-assessment, teachers will know if students have already mastered concepts prior to a lesson or unit. Teachers differentiate instruction so that students continue to grow and progress. There will be

no

difference with the new reporting tool. In fact, teachers will be more enabled to identify who really has mastered the standard and who requires additional challenging or enrichment lessons.

7. **Q.** How will students with an Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.) be graded on a standards-based report card?

**A.** Students with an I.E.P. must be provided with the opportunity to receive the same grades as their peers who do not receive special education services. Since special education students are a heterogeneous group with various disabilities, some may not master certain grade-level standards without special services and supports. For students with accommodations, the content of the standard stays the same. However, the method for learning and demonstrating mastery of a standard may be adjusted. If the student with consistently implemented accommodations is still not making progress toward achieving the grade level standards, then the implementation of modifications may be necessary. Modifications mean changing the grade level standard to a standard that is fundamentally related but also developmentally appropriate for the student. The I.E.P. team, including the parents, make decisions regarding what content areas require the modification of grade level standards. For all students with an I.E.P., a supplemental progress report will be provided. The supplemental progress report will identify how students are performing on appropriately challenging learning tasks as outlined in the goals and objectives of their I.E.P.

8. **Q.** How will English language Learners (E.L.L.) be graded on a standards-based

report card?

**A.** The learning outcome of grade level standards are the same for all students. However, some English Language Learners may require a variety of supports to access the curriculum. At times, the educational program for an E.L.L. student may be adjusted to enable the student to acquire more academic vocabulary. If the standards are modified, then a supplemental progress report will be provided to describe the modifications.

9. **Q.** Will standards-based report cards be used for all grade levels in the school district?

**A.** No. Standards-based report cards will only be used for students in kindergarten through second grades during the 2018-2019 academic year. The shift from traditional report cards to standards-based report cards for students in grades 3-5 will occur during the 2019-2020 school year.

10. **Q.** Are other neighboring communities successfully using standards-based report cards?

**A.** Yes. Many elementary school districts in this area, as well as across the country, have made the switch to a standards-based grading system. This is a national movement based on years of research.