

## Standards-Based Grading Fall 2013 FAQ



### How does standards-based grading work?

Traditional grading averages a student's achievement data with other criteria, such as work habits. Standards-Based Grading removes extraneous factors and focuses solely on a student's academic achievement and continued mounting evidence that indicates a true assessment of the student's present attainment of learning. Other characteristics are reported separately.

### How is standards-based grading different?

The student's grade more accurately represents the progress toward proficiency of standards than traditional grading does. Subject areas are subdivided into big ideas related to standards and their respective learning outcomes that students need to learn or master. Each target is assessed. Scores from activities that are provided solely for practice will not be included in the final assessment of the learning outcome. The influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning is reported separately from the academics.

### Why aren't grades just averaged?

Because the purpose of standards-based grading is to report what students know and are able to do, averaging does not represent an accurate picture of where a student is in his/her learning. A student who struggles in a class at the beginning of a grading period and receives poor grades, but who keeps working and by the end of the grading period can clearly demonstrate competence in the subject, should receive a grade that reflects that competence. The average is a fixture in most grading systems, but the average does not always represent the data accurately. Consider two students, Stewart and Maria. Stewart earns the following scores: 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85 and 85. The average is not difficult to calculate, and Stewart's grade is posted as a B. Maria struggles in math and turns in this performance: 50, 60, 65, 70, 80, 85, 90, 90, and 90. Her mean score of a little over 75 would result in a C on her report card, but it is obvious that Maria now understands the math even though she struggled in the beginning.

### How will student progress be measured?

The District Standards were synthesized into major learning goals (Gradebook Reporting Criteria, or GRCs) to provide clear and concise information to parents regarding student progress. Teachers collect evidence of student understanding through observations, class work, projects, and test data then evaluate overall performance using the following scale: **4 – 3 – 2 – 1.**

### **So is a 4 like and A, a 3 like a B and so on?**

No. While it may feel as though standards-based grading performance scale scores are easy to translate to the traditional A, B, C, D, F, it is actually quite difficult, and should be avoided in Standards-Based Grading. Think of the two grading methods as totally different languages. For example, Mandarin Chinese has words and phrases that cannot be translated accurately into English because no English equivalent exists. It is like that with Standards-Based Grading. In Standards-Based Grading, a 1 is a very narrow range which communicates that the student has made little or no progress toward the standard. A 2 tends to have a larger range because it includes student performance that ranges from just a little closer to the standard than a 1, to just a little short of meeting the standard of a 3. A 3 indicates that the student has met the standard, and is right where we expect the student to be. A 4 is quite narrow because it indicates that not only has the student met the standard, but has also taken the skills and concepts and transferred them with greater complexity and depth into other areas and disciplines. In traditional grading, letter grades report the number of points earned in a subject, and doesn't report very much about what the student has learned.

### **What about students who have an IEP? How will their progress be represented through standards-based grading?**

Standards-based grading principles and tenets are equally as applicable and appropriate for students with disabilities as they are for their typical peers. IEP teams, inclusive of general educators, should determine what, if any, adaptations are needed for students to master grade-level expectations. Some students on an IEP have **accommodations** that support them with making progress to grade-level standards. These students will be instructed with these accommodations and then graded on the GRCs as written in the GRC rubrics. Other students may have **modified** grade-level expectations (standards) written into their IEP. If a student has a modified grade-level expectation as part of his or her IEP, the GRC that represents the modified standard should be noted on any report card or progress report and parents should be aware that their student is working toward a modified standard.

### **What about students who are English Language Learners? How will their progress be represented through standards-based grading?**

Standards-based grading principles and tenets are equally as applicable and appropriate for students who are learning English as they are for their native English speaking peers. English Language Learners may have **modified** grade-level expectations for any oral language and/or communication standard within various content areas. This includes all Reading, Writing and Communicating Standards, as well as any communication standards within other content areas. The modification within these standards should be adjusted based on the student's current placement along the language acquisition continuum. The GRC that represents the modified oral language or communication standard should be noted on any report card or progress report and parents should be aware that their student is working

toward a modified communication standard, including knowledge about their student's current language development on the continuum.

### **How will I know what progress my student is making and if he or she is on track to meeting the standard?**

In order to know what progress students are making, parents should begin with talking to their student's teacher to understand what assignments, assessments and/or student work products are most important for their student in regard to the GRCs in any given content area. Schools using the IC gradebook with the parent portal, will have certain assignments, assessments and/or student work products listed in the online gradebook with a 1, 2, 3, or 4 score. Parents should look at these scores over the course of the semester and pay attention to trends in these scores, knowing that they will not be averaged, but that over time, students should be progressing toward 3's and 4's by the end of the semester. Teachers will be using assignments, assessments and student work products as a body of evidence to make a final mark at semester. Some elementary schools are not yet using the IC online gradebook and will be communicating with parents about these assignments, assessments and/or student work products through conferences, and regular and timely parent communications.

### **So what about homework? I've heard it doesn't "count" in standards-based grading. How do I make sure my student understands the importance of homework if it isn't part of the final grade?**

Homework is practice. Therefore, let's re-think the question to be, "Does practice count?" To use a sports analogy, or a knitting analogy, or a painting analogy, or an accounting analogy or pretty much any other analogy you can think of... Practice is *extremely* important and valuable as it prepares you to perform. Let's take Peyton Manning as an example. Manning is known for his dedication to practice and study. He's one of the first ones at practice and he's one of the last to leave. He works incredibly hard while practicing, but his work on the practice field or during preseason games doesn't "count" at the end of the season. What "counts" is his performance in actual games - in our case, the assignments, assessments and/or student work products.

#### ***Here are some examples:***

Law School is practice. The Bar Exam counts as performance against the standards of practicing law. There are examples of people passing the Bar Exam with very little formal law study, and there are lots of examples of people who attended numerous law school classes and may have even earned a law degree, but they never passed a bar exam.

Driver's Ed is practice. The driving exam "counts."

Cosmetology school is practice. The cosmetology state board exam "counts" – serving satisfied clients as a cosmetologist "counts."

Studying accounting is practice. The CPA exam "counts" - performing your accounting job well once you've landed a job "counts."

Homework assignments need to be aligned to GRCs in order for students to utilize homework as practice toward proficient performance on grade-level standards. Students should be able to articulate how a homework assignment helps them practice toward performance at a 3 or 4 in any given GRC. Teachers should NOT use homework completion as an indicator of student proficiency on a GRC or standard and instead should use student assignments, assessments and/or student work products from class to determine proficiency. However, teachers SHOULD use homework completion as an indicator of a student's progress toward **Scholarly Habits** (Respect, Preparation, Risk Taking, Perseverance, and Excellence). Progress on Scholarly Habits will be reported each semester