



Standards Based Grading - Frequently Asked Questions

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Why are we moving to a standards-based grading system?

We want to improve student achievement for every student and ensure mastery. Research supports this method of grading as a way to communicate student learning more effectively through better feedback along the way. Standards-based grading allows teachers to report student progress specifically on the standards. Providing specific and frequent feedback has proven to be a factor in increasing student achievement.

How is standards-based grading different?

Compared to traditional grading, standards-based grading more accurately represents learning progress towards meeting standards. Assessing progress towards each standard allows feedback that is specific. Subject areas are divided into big ideas related to standards that students need to learn or master. Each standard/target is assessed. Scores from activities that are provided solely for practice will not be included in the final assessment of the learning outcome.

What are the advantages of standards-based grading?

Learning outcomes are clear to students throughout instruction. Parents and students can see which learning outcomes/standards students have mastered and which ones need re-teaching or re-learning. Standards-based grading can change at-home conversations between students and the parents from, "Have you finished your project?" to "Tell me your understanding of this standard," or "What more do you need to do to achieve mastery of this standard?"

How are my child's scores determined?

A student's performance on a series of assessments (both formative and summative) will be used to determine a student's overall grade in a course. Practice assignments (homework) are just that, practice, and are a source of feedback and instructional support for both students and teachers. Scores on practice assignments should not be used as a major component of a student's academic grade. Teachers may require students to complete all of their practice work prior to allowing them to take, or retake, an assessment.

What is a standards-based report card?

A standards-based report card provides information about how your child is progressing towards meeting standards during the course of the school year. It measures how well your child is performing in relation to the grade-level standards as compared to the traditional letter-grade system that gives a compiled grade for work completed in a subject area. It gives every child in every school the opportunity to meet or exceed grade level standards. It gives parents a more detailed and accurate assessment of how your child is progressing academically.

How does standards-based grading differ from traditional grading?

Unlike with traditional grading systems, a standards-based grading system measures a student's mastery of grade-level standards by prioritizing the most recent, consistent level of performance. A student who may have struggled at the beginning of learning a new concept may still be able to demonstrate mastery of key concepts by the end of a unit of study. In a traditional grading system, a student's performance for an entire trimester is averaged together. That means an early low quiz scores would be averaged together with more proficient performance later in the course, resulting in a lower overall grade than current performance would indicate.

Standards-based report cards separate academic performance from work habits and behavior in order to provide parents a more accurate view of a student's progress in both academic and behavioral areas. Variables such as effort, participation, timeliness, cooperation, attitude and attendance are reported separately, not as an indicator of a student's academic performance.

Traditional Grading System	Standards-Based Grading System
Each assessment (quiz, test, project, etc.) is graded as a whole and entered once in a gradebook.	Each assessment is aligned to the standards it assesses. Students receive a score on each standard covered within that assessment.
Assessments are based on a percentage system. Criteria for success may be unclear or differ from teacher to teacher.	Standards are the criteria. Criteria / targets are made available to students ahead of time.
Uses a mix of assessment, achievement, effort, and behavior to determine the final grade. May use late penalties and extra credit.	Measures achievement and separates achievement from effort/behavior. No penalties or extra credit given.
Everything goes in the grade book – regardless of purpose.	Selected assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.) are used for grading purposes.
Includes every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average, not the best or most recent work.	Emphasizes the most recent evidence of learning when grading.

Table Adapted from O'Connor K (2002). How to Grade for Learning: Linking grades to standards (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.