

Metcalf Elementary School



Standards-Based Grading & Report Cards

A Parent Guide

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What is an Academic Standard?

Standards are specific learning goals which apply to all students. They provide consistent and clearly defined targets for students, teachers and families. Standards provide the direction for the teacher, child and parent/guardian about the expectations for all children. At the heart of the standards movement is the belief that effort leads to ability. A combination of targeted and creative instructional support and sustained effort over time should make it possible for all students to achieve these expectations because the standards always remain constant. The time needed to meet them, however, may vary from student to student. In a standards-based classroom the focus is on student performance, not simply on taking quizzes and tests. Just as artists use portfolios to showcase their talent and a professional educator must first be a “student teacher,” our students must be able to demonstrate their competencies through actual demonstrations, performances, and portfolios that show evidence of their learning.

Overview of Standards-Based Grading

A report card is an ongoing conversation between the teacher, the student, and the parent or guardian about what is expected of students and how to help them to be successful in a rigorous academic program. The Common Core State Standards aim to provide a consistent and clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at each grade level as a basis for this conversation. Aligning our report cards to the Common Core State Standards enables teachers to provide specific feedback about a child's progress as he/she works to reach proficiency in meeting these grade level expectations. It is important to have clear and consistent standards in place for our students, teachers, and parents as we work together to provide a rich and rewarding learning experience for our children. It is equally important to provide the educational supports and scaffolding to ensure students experience the sequential steps of instruction while working towards reaching their individual goals.

It is our hope that by providing you with detailed information regarding academic and behavioral expectations for your child that you and your child's teacher can better work together to assure your child's success. Parents are our greatest partners in this important endeavor!

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The simple answer is: We want to improve student achievement for all students in every classroom every day; and research supports standards-based grading as a basis of communication that will help students learn more effectively through better feedback.

2. What is standards-based grading?

In a standards-based system, teachers report what students know and are able to do in relation to the State and District Standards. The system includes:

- The improvement of student achievement of required learning outcomes in all content areas,
- The mastery of defined learning outcomes instead of the accumulation of points,
- The reporting of student achievement toward meeting learning outcomes at a given time by analyzing recent trend information based on various forms of evidence,
- A record keeping system that provides teachers with information that allows them to adjust learning practices to meet the needs of students, and
- A system that encourages student reflection and responsibility

3. What are the purposes of standards-based grading?

The purpose of standards-based grading is to raise student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress towards learning outcomes in a timely, accurate, fair, and specific manner. SBG accurately communicates student achievement to students, parents, and educators. The influence of work habits on student learning is reported separately from the academics.

4. How does standards-based grading work?

Traditional grading averages a student's achievement data with other characteristics, such as work habits. SBG 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.

5. 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.

6. What are the advantages of standards-based grading?

Learning outcomes are clearly articulated to the students throughout instruction. Parents and students can see which learning outcomes students have mastered and which ones need re-teaching or re-learning. SBG can change the complexion of at-home conversations between the student and the parent/guardian from, “Why didn’t you finish your work?” “Did you make up that quiz you missed?” and “Have you finished your project?” to “Tell me your understanding of this standard,” “How does your teacher connect your in-class work to the unit’s objectives?” or “What more do you need to do to achieve this benchmark?” Some students struggle at the beginning of units, fail assessments and give up; with SBG, the door remains open to achieving standards.

7. What are the disadvantages of standards-based grading?

Of all aspects of our education system, none seems more impervious to change than grading and reporting. Changing long-held traditions is a difficult and lengthy process.

8. Why aren’t grades just averaged?

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 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.

9. So is a 5 like an A, a 4 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 and is substantially below the standard. A 2 indicates that a student is making some progress but is currently performing below the standard. A 3 has a somewhat larger range and indicates that the student is making steady progress, almost meeting the standard. A 4 indicates that the student has met the standard, and is right where we expect the student to be. 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.

10. 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 child's teacher to understand what assignments, assessments and/or student work products are most important for their student in any given content area. Parents should look at scores over the course of the trimester and pay attention to trends in these scores, knowing that they will not be averaged, but that over time, students should be progressing toward 4's or 5's by the end of the trimester. Teachers will be using assignments, assessments, and student work products as a body of evidence to determine a final mark for report cards.

11. 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-frame 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 Tom Brady as an example. Brady 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:

- Driver's Ed is practice. The driving exam, and therefore driving safely "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 educational standards 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 in any given area. Teachers should NOT use homework completion as an indicator of student proficiency on a 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 specific Learner Qualities.

12. How are we going to teach our kids that in the real world or on tests such as CSAP, ACT, etc., that they must do their best the first time or on a continuous basis?

Our goal is student learning. We all know students learn at different rates, and students have issues that may affect their testing ability on a given day. Many real life final tests such as driver's license, ACT, SAT, bar exam, MCATS, Olympics, etc. offer multiple opportunities for mastery with no penalty for number of attempts. There are still deadlines within units and some of the practice work is time bound. There are indeed cut off times for assignments per teacher discretion when late work will simply not be accepted because the unit is over.

13. How will student progress be measured?

The District Standards have been synthesized into major learning goals (report card criteria) 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 a five point scale.

Academic Key

4 - Meeting Standard: The student's work meets the expectations for the quality of work within the subject area during the marking period. The student consistently exhibits strong/solid command of content.

3 - Approaching/Making significant Progress Toward the Standard: This is a somewhat larger range and indicates the student's work is approaching the expectations for the quality of work within the subject area during the marking period, but does not yet meet the expectations. The student is making significant progress toward proficiency with some content needing additional focus.

2 -Making Some Progress Toward the Standard: The student's work is not meeting expectations for the quality of work within the subject area. With support, the student is making some progress towards this standard.

1 - Making Limited to No Progress Toward the Standard: This is a very narrow range which communicates that the student has made little or no progress and is substantially below the standard. Instructional supports are being implemented in this area.

*** - Standard not addressed at this time:** The standard will be taught later in the school year when more developmentally appropriate.

Inc. - Incomplete: The student has not completed a major project(s), assessment(s), or assignment(s) in the subject area. This may be changed to a 1-5 once the missing work is completed and turned in, in accordance with district policy

Learner Qualities

A reporting system should provide parents with a complete picture of their child as a learner. Parents expect to know where their child is academically, but it is also important for them to have feedback on their child's social development and work habits. These are referred to as Learner Qualities. This information allows parents to develop a clearer picture of their child as a learner, and it also helps parents to target improvement efforts where they are needed. These learner qualities, or life skills, impact academic achievement and help to prepare students for a successful future. Learner qualities represent habits of mind as well as habits of life.

The following Learner Qualities are specifically taught to students throughout the school year and assessed on our report card separately from academic areas:

- Follows directions and routines
- Works independently
- Listens attentively
- Works cooperatively
- Uses time effectively
- Completes homework
- Completes work carefully and legibly
- Accepts and applies constructive feedback
- Demonstrates organizational skills
- Takes responsibility for learning
- Exhibits respectful, responsible, and safe behavior
- Participates in class
- Comes to class prepared

The consistency with which the student demonstrates these behaviors that promote learning are reported as:

S - Secure

D - Developing

N - Needs Improvement

Glossary of Terms

READING: (Literature and Informational)

Key ideas and Details-With grade level texts, students can make inferences, cite evidence, determine ideas and themes, summarize key ideas and details and understand how and why people, events and ideas develop and interact within a text.

Craft and Structure-Students can understand word meanings, how texts are structured, and point of view and how the author uses them to shape the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas-Students can combine information from different forms of media (visual, audio and written) on the same topic to increase knowledge or compare how authors think. They can judge arguments and claims in a text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity -Students can independently read and understand texts within the grade-level range of complexity (literary and informational).

Foundational Skills: (K-5)

- **Print Concepts**-Students can show an understanding of the organization and basic features of print.
- **Phonological Awareness**-Students can show an understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds.
- **Phonics and Recognition**-Students can sound out and read words accurately.
- **Fluency**-Students can read words correctly and fluently for understanding.

WRITING

Production and Distribution of Writing-Students can create writing for different audiences and purposes. Students can develop and strengthen their writing through the writing process (planning, revising, editing, rewriting). Students can use technology to work with others and to create and publish writing.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge-Students can conduct research projects by gathering information from multiple sources (print and digital) to provide evidence. Range of Writing-Students can write for a variety of tasks, audiences, and purposes.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Comprehension and Collaboration-Students can work with others by expressing themselves and building on others' ideas. Students can combine information presented in different formats and evaluate speakers.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas -Students can present information for a variety of tasks and audiences. Students can include digital and visual displays and change their speech depending on the context of the task.

LANGUAGE

Conventions of Standard English-Students can correctly use standard English when writing and speaking. Students can correctly use standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.

Knowledge of Language-Students can use their knowledge of how language works to fully understand when reading and listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use-Students can figure out the meaning of words and figurative language and correctly use vocabulary.

MATH

There are two types of mathematics standards: Standards for Mathematical Practice and Content Standards. Both types of standards are equally important. Neither is intended to stand alone; both support and enhance the development of the other. Together, they weave a new picture of what the teaching and learning of mathematics should look like to ensure students have a deeper understanding of the math content.

Standards for Mathematical Practice (SMP)-The SMP describe the habits of mind or the dispositions of a mathematical thinker. These standards, which are included at each grade level, help students grapple with, make sense of, and grow in their ability to think mathematically about the grade-specific content standards.

Content Standards – The content standards are grade specific, and each grade concentrates on a clear set of math concepts and skills. Students will learn concepts in a more organized way both during the school year and across grades. The standards encourage students to solve real-world problems.