



## **Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation**

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### **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Standards-Based Grading**

#### **1) What is Standards-Based Grading?**

Standards-Based Grading means that student performance is measured in relationship to defined course outcomes. In our case, those are the Indiana State Standards. Standards-Based Reporting involves reporting student proficiency in relationship to those standards on a report card and in gradebooks.

#### **2) How are the standards that are taught at each grade level determined?**

All Indiana Standards are addressed by our teachers. Teachers in each grade level and department review all Indiana standards for their subject in relationship to the following three criterias:

- Importance for students to know for the the real world, not just the test
- The concept/skill will help the student understand other concepts or skills within the same discipline or other disciplines
- Helps prepare students for the next course or grade level

The most important standards or “essential learnings” are identified by content area experts, our teachers. These represent the knowledge and skills that are deemed necessary for success in school, higher education, careers and life.

Essential standards are reviewed every year and adjustments are made by teachers.

#### **3) What is a proficiency scale?**

A proficiency scale represents a continuum of knowledge or progression of learning for each essential Indiana standard. They allow students to receive very specific feedback regarding their current level of performance and their next step in learning. Proficiency scales are very similar to rubrics. In some schools/districts they are referred to as rubrics.

These proficiency scales have been represented in a 1-4 format in most cases. Some organizations have utilized 1-5 or 1-3. The selection of a 1-4 scale was determined locally. Below is a generalized description of what the levels represent.

1. Beginning
2. Progressing
3. Proficient
4. Mastery

**4) Does this replace the traditional letter grades at the secondary level? How would these translate to a transcript for college application purposes?**

No, the intent is to maintain a standards based reporting system that retains letter grades, A-F. The high school transcript will not change. Colleges and Universities have never required or requested student's individual strengths or weaknesses within any given course. They only want the semester grade, end of year grade, and GPA. None of this is going away at our high school.

Schools who have gone away from grades and completely toward proficiency scales (reminder: we are not doing that) have experienced college entrance processes for their students. The link below addresses how the representative universities handle the use of standards-based grading and college admissions.

[http://www.rsu22.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hanover\\_summary\\_of\\_SBG.pdf](http://www.rsu22.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hanover_summary_of_SBG.pdf)

**5) Why has CPCSC been working on this type of system?**

There is an abundance of evidence in our field indicating that the practices inherent and associated with standards-based grading are beneficial to learners. Generally, listed below are some benefits as they relate to students and parents.

Benefits for students:

- Ability to set clear short term and long term objectives or goals
- Opportunity to receive very clear and targeted feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses
- The opportunity to extend learning by accelerating
- The opportunity to take control of their own learning
- The opportunity for different types of assessment including student generated assessments *generate* ideas about the manner in which they will demonstrate their current status on learning

Benefits for parents:

- Ability to identify very specific areas of need in order to help the student

- Clear picture of where the student is doing well and where the student is not doing well
- Elimination of surprises in grading - grades are based on transparent data

For more information regarding standards-based grading/reporting please read this brief research primer:

[http://mctownsley.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SBG\\_research\\_primer\\_Townsley\\_Bu ckmilller.pdf](http://mctownsley.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SBG_research_primer_Townsley_Bu ckmilller.pdf)

**6) What grades are implementing standards-based grading in the current iteration and when did they begin? How might this progress in future years?**

- K-4-piloted 2013-2014
- K-4-Full implementation 2014-2015
- Grade 5 - 2015-2016
- Grade 6 - 2016-2017
- *\*\*Grade 7, Algebra, and middle school band- 2017-2018*
- *\*\*Grade 8, Biology, Computer Science, Geometry- 2018-2019*
- *\*\*Grades 9-12- 2019-2020*

*\*\*This is a possible timeline. No definitive decision has been made at this time regarding 2017 and beyond.*

**7) Has the move to standards-based grading been rushed?**

The transition has been slow and gradual. Standards-based grading actually began in Clark-Pleasant Schools at the elementary level in the early 2000's. At that time, students and parents were informed of their performance on standards with a lettering system of M, U, S, and V (M= mastery, U= understanding, etc...). More recently, during the 2013-2014 school year, elementary staff created and began piloting the rubrics or proficiency scales that align to the standards. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, they began utilizing and reporting progress on our report cards with these proficiency scales. This has moved up one grade level each year since that time.

**8) Does the move to standards-based grading always start at the elementary level? Does it benefit elementary students more than secondary students?**

Some school districts phase in standards-based grading starting at the elementary level and then move up grade levels over time. Other school districts start at the high school level and move down, and some roll it out to all grade levels at the same time. There is no one "right way" to move toward standards-based grading. The move to standards-based grading has the potential to help all students regardless of aptitude or grade level.

**9) What evidence exists that a standards-based learning approach to education leads to higher levels of student achievement?**

There are at least three distinct bases of research that support this type of approach. They are feedback, formative assessment, and student goal setting and tracking of progress.

**Feedback:**

“Feedback is the information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning.”

Valerie Shute (2008)

“The purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understanding and performance and a goal. “

John Hattie and Helen Timperley (2009)

There is over 30 years of research about providing students with specific feedback with effect size from meta-analyses ranging from .26 to 1.47.

What is effect size? Effect size is simply a way of quantifying the size of the difference between two groups. It is easy to calculate, readily understood and can be applied to any measured outcome in Education or Social Science. It allows us to move beyond the simplistic, “Does it work or not?” to the far more sophisticated, “How well does it work in a range of contexts?” For these reasons, effect size is an important tool in reporting and interpreting effectiveness.

The most recent meta-analysis of feedback was conducted by John Hattie 2007. In his book, *Visible Learning*, Hattie presented the biggest ever collection of research into what actually works in schools to improve children’s learning. Not what was fashionable, not what political and educational vested interests wanted to champion, but what actually produced the best results in terms of improving learning and educational outcomes.

Not all feedback is created equal. Effective feedback focuses on the task, the process, and/or self-regulation. In this case the effect size tells you how many standard deviations larger (or smaller) the average score for a group of students who were exposed to a given strategy is than the average score for a group of students who were not exposed to a given strategy. Effect sizes tell you how powerful a strategy is; the larger the effect size, the more the strategy increases student learning. Small effect size can translate into big percentile gains.

- Negative Feedback (no indication of how to get better, for example only listing the number of problems right or wrong in a traditional grading system) = Effect Size of  $-.0.14$
- Rewards = Effect Size of  $.34$
- Praise = Effect Size of  $.14$
- Punishment = Effect Size of  $0.20$
- Cues = Effect Size of  $1.10$  (cannot be done effectively without a learning progression)
- Reinforcement = Effect Size of  $.94$  (cannot be done effectively without a learning progression)

### **Formative Assessment Defined:**

“Assessments for learning happen while learning is still underway. These are the assessments that are conducted throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs plan the next steps instruction, provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work and help student see and feel in control of their journey to success....this is about getting better.”

Rick Stiggins, Judith Arter, Jan Chappuis and Stephen Chappuis (2006)

“Formative assessment is a loop: Students and teachers focus on a learning target, evaluate current student work against the target, act to move the work closer to the target, and repeat.”

Susan Brookhart and Anthony Nitko (2007)

“There is strong and rigorous evidence that improving formative assessment can raise standards of pupil’s performance. There have been few initiatives in education with such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards.”

(Black and Wiliam, 198, p.20)

### **Student Goal Setting and Tracking Student Progress:**

Student goal setting works best when the parents, teachers, and students work together to develop individual goals.

Hattie (2009)The major feedback questions are “Where am I going?” (learning intentions/goals/success criteria) How am I going? (self-assessment and self-evaluation), and “Where to next?” (Learning progression, new goals).

Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2006) reported an effect size  $.65$  as the impact for setting goals and learning intentions

Clarke, Timperley and Hattie (2003) have noted some important points about learning intentions and planning.

- Not all students in the class will be working at the same level, so it is important to adapt the learning intentions for all students.
- The amount of time allocated should not be the same for all learning intentions or the acquisition of knowledge.

Ames (1992) explained that a mastery goal is a more specific type of learning intention. With a mastery goal, individuals are oriented towards developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of proficiency.

Mastery learning requires numerous feedback loops, based on small units of well-defined, appropriately sequenced outcomes. Bloom (1968)

This represents some of the research that a standards-based approach to learning is built upon. If you would like more information regarding the research base, please feel free to contact us. If you find research that refutes this type of approach, please share that with us as well.

**10) I have heard that there are only a handful of schools that utilize Standards-Based Grading. Is this true?**

No. There are thousands of schools at all levels across the country that utilize standards-based grading in some form or fashion. The number of schools continues to grow each year. It is rare at the secondary level to have a system of standards-based grading that does not include a letter grade.

**11) Have the expectations regarding learning outcomes for students changed?**

Yes. In recent years expectations for student performance has greatly increased with the implementation of new Indiana Academic Standards, the new Every Student Succeeds Act, the new SAT, new accountability assessments, and new graduation tests.

We would encourage you to look at the facts regarding standards based learning objectively, share any concerns that you have with us, and work through those concerns in a functional manner. We are always happy to meet and discuss everything that is going on in our schools. After all, we are partners in the education of our children.