

Standards Based Grading and Reporting Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why have we moved to a standards-based grading system?

We want to improve student achievement for every student. Research supports standards-based grading as a basis of communication that will help students learn more effectively through better feedback. Providing specific and frequent feedback has proven to be a factor in increasing student achievement. Standards based grading aligns more closely with this type of feedback.

What is standards-based grading?

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

- Improved student achievement towards learning the essential outcomes in all of the content areas
- Focus is on the mastery of defined learning outcomes instead of the accumulation of points
- Better communicates student achievement more precisely to both students and parents.
- 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
- A system that encourages student reflection and responsibility

What are the purposes of standards-based grading?

The purpose of standards-based grading is to increase student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress towards learning outcomes in a timely, accurate, fair, and specific manner. In addition, standards-based grading allows teachers to report student progress specifically on the standards. We have a common language and practice across our system in what we expect of students at various grade levels and various content areas and make sure parents and students understand that expectation and their next steps toward being on grade level. Standards-based grading accurately communicates student achievement to students, parents, and educators. The influence of work habits on student learning is reported separately from the academics.

How does standards-based grading work?

Traditional grading averages a student's achievement data with other characteristics, 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.

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. Standards-based grading 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 standard?" Some students struggle at the beginning of units, fail assessments and give up; with standards based grading, the door remains open to achieving standards.

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.

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 average 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 are we going to teach our kids that in the real world or on tests such as K-PREP, ACT, SAT, 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, 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 cut off times for assignments per teacher discretion when late work will simply not be accepted because the unit is over.

How will student progress be measured?

The Kentucky Academic Standards were categorized into major learning goals 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:

Kindergarten - 6th Grade

Mastery	Demonstrate a complete understanding of the standard Used appropriate process to solve problems
Near Mastery	Demonstrate a basic knowledge of the standard Sometimes used appropriate process to solve problems
Remediation	Demonstrated minimal understanding of the standard Rarely use appropriate process to solve problems

GRADES 7-8

Scoring Domain	Not Observed	Unsatisfactory	Novice	N/A	Apprentice	A/P	Proficient	P/D	Distinguished
Grade Range	0	5	6	7	8	8.5	9	9.5	10
	No evidence to be evaluated.	Makes an attempt, but does not meet any part of the standard	Makes an attempt to show basic knowledge about standard such as define, identify, etc.		Shows basic knowledge of standard and can compare, contrast, or other simple functions using that knowledge		Shows complete understanding of standard through various ways		Create, express, design, or manipulate in some way using their understanding of the standard with no errors

Will standards based grading expand into upper elementary, middle school, and high school?

Currently standards based grading and reporting are in place for Kindergarten to 8th grade. At the middle school level, a hybrid system is in place to make the transition from elementary to high school. The hybrid system involves standards based instruction and grading; however, the grade for each subject area will be averaged and assigned an actual number grade. The high school has

implemented standards based grading in Language Arts and Science classes with plans to expand to other subjects in the future. At this time, there is no plan to discontinue letter grades at the high school level.

Have schools that use standards-based grading experienced significant increases in achievement?

Research on standards-based grading shows overwhelmingly that students learn their subjects better and perform higher in later education levels. The foundation for the better performance is the feedback that standards based grading is built on. Students, parents and teachers are all more aware of how the student is performing on each standard and therefore can more specifically target the student's strengths and weaknesses.

How can I check my child's progress?

Report cards are still emailed or printed on a quarterly basis for all students K-12 and progress reports are sent home for all students in grades K-12. Parents of students in grades K-6 have access to Mastery Connect. This account allows parents to view their child's progress on the standards throughout the grading period. Additionally, parents of students in grades 7 and 8 have access to Schoology. This account allows parents to view their child's grades, assignments, videos and other material by using the Internet. Both programs are updated regularly so parents can see progress throughout the marking period. Both programs require an individual account for each student, so the grades are secure and can only be viewed with the proper username and password.

Why do some standards need 100% mastery?

Some standards such as learning the alphabet and counting require 100% mastery.

Suggested Readings

Brookhart, S.M. (2011). Starting the Conversation about Grading. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 10-14.

Gusky, T.R. (2011). Five Obstacles to Grading Reform. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 17-21.

Marzano, R.J. and Heflebower, T. (2011). Grades That Show What Students Know. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 34-39.

O'Connor, K. and Wormeli, R. (2011). Reporting Student Learning. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 40-44.

Wormeli (2006). Fair Isn't Always Equal.

http://www.isacs.org/misc_files/Annual_Wormeli_Fair%20Equal.pdf

Brookhart, S.M. (2008). *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. ASCD, Alexandria, VA.

Marzano, R.J. (2006). *Classroom Assessment & Grading That Work*. ASCD, Alexandria, VA.