

Standards-Based Grading FAQs for Elementary School Parents

What is standards-based grading?

Standards-based grading communicates how students are performing on a set of clearly defined learning targets called standards. The purpose of standards-based grading is to identify what a student knows, or is able to do, in relation to pre-established learning targets, as opposed to simply averaging grades/scores over the course of a grading period, which can mask what a student has learned, or not learned, in a specific course.

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. Thus a student who may have struggled at the beginning of a course, when first encountering new materials, may still be able to demonstrate mastery of key content/concepts by the end of a grading period. In a traditional grading system, a student's performance for an entire quarter is averaged together. Early scores that were low would be averaged together with more proficient performance later in the course, resulting in lower overall grade than current performance indicates. Standards-based grading factors only academic measurements and does not factor non-academic marks such as participation, extra credit, behavior or attendance.

How are my child's marks 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 thus should serve primarily as 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. Teacher may require students to complete all of their practice work prior to allowing them to take, or retake an assessment.

Will my student still receive teacher comments on their report card?

Yes. Individualized feedback is an essential component of standards-based grading. Effective feedback is a more useful source of information than simply assigning a numeric value or letter grade to student work.

What will each of the numbers in the 4 point scale represent?

A score of (4) would indicate that a student exceeds a standard by consistently demonstrating an advanced level of understanding and/or the ability to apply their knowledge at a higher level.

A score of (3) would indicate that a student has independently achieved the standard. The student demonstrates mastery of the standard.

A score of (2) would indicate that a student is developing an understanding of a standard, but still may be in need of additional instruction and/or support.

A score of (1) would indicate minimal understanding of a standard. The student show limited evidence of understanding the standard.

How should a student/parent view student their marks in this 4-point scale? What is considered to be an A in the new grading system?

You cannot really compare a traditional grading system to standards-based grading. It is like comparing “apples to oranges”. Standards-based grading identifies a standard and indicates whether or not a student is meeting the standard at a given point in the school year. A score of (3) is defined as meeting grade level standards and indicates that a student has demonstrated mastery of the skills that were expected to be learned by that point in the grading period.

If a student is being accelerated in any grade level/subject area with above grade level standards or materials, is that student required to get a 4 on the report card?

By definition, level 4 work reflects higher order thinking, application, connection and extension of targeted goals. While being instructed above grade level is not required in order to achieve a (4), students who are taught above grade level have consistently shown mastery of a subject at their current grade level. Achieving a (4) does not preclude a teacher from suggesting areas for improvement in the comment section of the report card. Receiving a (4) does not guarantee that a students’ performance would remain at the level across all reporting periods, or for all course standards.

If a student receives 1’s all year, does that mean the student will be retained?

Intervention classes are in place in all of our elementary schools that support learners who are behind in reading and math. If a student receives 1’s or 2’s, it means their work is not yet meeting grade level standards. A number of academic interventions will be offered to those students who are struggling to meet the established standards. Grade level retention is not a practice that is generally supported by research.

How will I know if my child needs help?

Receiving a 1, 2, or IE (insufficient evidence) on a grade/report card can be a sign that a student is in need of extra support in the areas where they are receiving low marks. This is one benefit of a standards-based report card, areas in need of support are clearly evident.

How can I monitor my student’s progress?

Parents now have access to ParentVUE for grades 1 – 5. This program requires a code to open your child’s report on academic achievement and each school site has information regarding your log in information. Marks in elementary school may not be as frequent as the secondary schools due to the “learning to learn” concept and assessment of that learning is less frequent. Please feel free to contact your child’s teacher at any time to schedule a time to meet regarding the needs of your student.