

Standards-Based Grading Frequently Asked Questions

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

We want to improve student achievement for all students in every classroom. Research supports this way of grading as a means to communicate student learning progress more effectively through better feedback along the way.

How is standards-based grading different?

Compared to traditional grading, standards-based grading more accurately represents learning progress towards the proficiency of standards. Assessing progress towards each standard allows feedback that is specific. We also separate process standards from content standards.

How are process standards different from content standards?

Content standards articulate what students should know and be able to do academically. Process standards articulate behaviors that lead to academic success.

Example Content Standard: Reads and comprehends grade-level texts with accuracy and fluency

Example Process Standard: Demonstrates perseverance with a variety of tasks

Why aren't grades just based on percentages?

Simply put, a percentage does not represent an accurate picture of where a student is in their learning. A student who struggles in their learning at the beginning of the trimester but keeps working at it and demonstrates solid understanding by the end of the trimester should receive a grade that shows they've mastered the standard.

Will letter grades go away?

Students at the junior high and high school levels will have letter grades and students at the elementary level will not have letter grades.

I'm thinking that a "4" is like an "A". Is that correct?

No. It might make sense to convert the levels of proficiency to the traditional grading system but we avoid doing this because we are no longer averaging learning. In Standards-Based Grading, we report what a student has learned and to what level. "1" indicates a student still needs help. "2" indicates the student is moving closer to mastery but is still working on it. "3" means the student has met the standard and is right where we expect them to be. "4" indicates a student not only has met the standard but is able to take the skills and concepts and transfer them to new learning. For the grades where we still using letter grades, an A student is a student who is secure, or a 3, on the content standards for that course.

How will I know if my student is on track throughout the year?

Just like in previous years, the classroom teacher will use assignments, assessments, and observations to determine how your student is doing. In the past you may have asked, "How is my student doing in math?" This question still applies, however your student's teacher will now be able to provide detail about the standards that are included within math which will provide you more information.

Why is it that my student can get all the answers correct on an assignment but not get a “4”?

Assignments are leveled to provide students with opportunities to practice what they need as well as demonstrate their understanding throughout the learning process. Some assignments may not have level 4 work included for a variety of reasons. Readiness is one reason for this. Students who are just beginning their learning and still on their way to mastery of the standard simply won't be ready to transfer their learning to a more complex task. Once they show they can accurately and consistently complete tasks at level 2 (approaching) and level 3 (secure) then they may be ready to move on to level 4. Keep in mind, level 4 requires an ability to independently demonstrate level 3 tasks and readiness to take it to another level with little or no instruction.

Example Tasks by Level (3rd Grade: solves problems involving division)

Level 2 Task-Student can draw equal groups and use multiplication table to solve simpler equations

Level 3 Task-Student can solve multi-step word problems involving division within 100 accurately and by using multiple strategies (not just traditional)

Level 4 Task-Student can create word problems to fit equations involving division as well as find and explain errors when given division representations

Will my student ever get opportunities to work at level 4?

Often, classroom teachers utilize pretests to determine where a student may start their learning. At times, students can demonstrate they already have mastery of standards on a pretest. In this case, the classroom teacher would provide opportunities for continued practice as well as level 4 experiences to extend their learning above and beyond the standard. Students who may not be ready for level 4 tasks at the beginning of a unit may be ready before the end of a unit. This, too, would be a time teachers would provide more complex tasks that challenge students into level 4. It's important to note that students may be ready for level 4 tasks in one unit but not in another. It all depends on how solidly they understand the standards (level 3).

Is it true that homework does not count in standards-based grading?

Homework that is practice is extremely important in the process of learning. In fact, practice typically makes a huge difference in the learning process. In this manner, homework counts very much. However, that being said, there is much more value placed on how students do in class on assignments, assessments, and other work. In life, practice is also important to doing well but doesn't always “count”. Here are some examples:

- Football...players practice hard all week but only performance in the actual game counts.
- Driver's Education...hours of practice matter a lot! However, the driving exam is what actually counts.
- Law school is practice but the Bar Exam is what counts.

Homework completion will be reflected in the scores given on the process standards, which are behaviors that are critical to success in academics. The scores on content standards will not reflect practice activities such as homework, but instead reflect the achievement on assessments, projects, final papers, or other demonstrations of learning. Letter grades at the secondary level will reflect the mastery of the content standards.