

Professional Learning Communities In Action

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) is the process by which the district operates. Every decision the district makes supports one or more of the PLC four essential questions:

- 1) What do we want students to learn?
- 2) How do we know if students learn it?
- 3) What do we do if students did learn it?
- 4) What do we do if students didn't learn it?

Purpose of Standards-Based Grading

The purpose of standard-based grading is to improve student achievement by focusing instruction and the alignment of curriculum with the essential standards. Standards-based grading and reporting will provide better communication to students, parents, teachers and administrators on what each student knows and is able to do according to the identified standards and separately assess the influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning.

Standards-Based Grading

Standards-based grading measures the mastery of the learning objectives, or how well students understand the material in class. It is based on a specific set of standards that students need to meet for each grade/content level. Marks are not a comparison of one student to another, but rather a way to measure how well students are doing on grade-level/course level standards. A standards based approach allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful in their educational program.

A standards-based approach:

- **Indicates what students know and are able to do**
- **Scores indicate a student's progress toward the attainment of a standard**
- **Clearly communicates expectations ahead of time**
- **Is based on complex tasks, as opposed to rote memory**
- **Occurs when appropriate, not just on scheduled days.**
- **Emphasizes the most recent evidence of learning**
- **Multiple methods of grade calculation are used to determine grades**

District Grading Practices:

Grading Practice #1:

Only include scores that relate to the achievement of the standards.

- Be clear about what students must know and be able to do.
- Have a clear understanding of what each level of performance looks like before students begin work by utilizing scoring guides.
- Ensure that questions are tied to essential standards to verify that assessments measure what is intended.
- Data collected on non-academic factors (effort, participation, attendance, attitude, adherence to class rules, late work, etc..) should be reported separately.
- Students will be allowed to make-up work missed due to absences. There is no reduction for late work.
- Base grades/scores on individual achievement not group scores. Cooperative learning is a researched based instructional strategy that all teachers are required to incorporate into their lesson planning, however, no grades are generated from this strategy.
- Don't give points for extra credit or use bonus points; seek only evidence that more work has resulted in a higher level of achievement.
- Apply other consequences for academic dishonesty other than reduced grades/scores.
- Homework cannot be included in the students' academic score. Homework should be a risk-free chance to experiment and practice with newly acquired skills without penalty.

Benefits

By reporting on specific learning standards, standard-based grading provides considerably more feedback about how a student is progressing toward learning each standard. This will allow us to report student learning more accurately and to the degree to which students have attained mastery of learning objectives.

It is essential for students to do homework that is tied closely to learning objectives and for students to see those connections. Teachers provide feedback on homework that is assigned to practice new skills.

Attendance, effort, behavior, participation and other factors are important but separating these from achievement factors will give parents a clearer picture about their student's learning. Students will be held accountable for these factors but they will be reported separately.

District Grading Practices:

Grading Practice #2

Use a variety of assessment methods to collect high quality, organized evidence of achievement.

- Use multiple measures to determine student achievement. Include more than one kind of assessment to examine the same kind of knowledge or skills (ex: paper/pencil assessments, essay assessments, performance assessments, lab assignments, oral presentations, etc..) to evaluate student achievement on grade/course level standards.
- Gather evidence using quality assessments.
- Organize and report evidence of learning by essential learning outcomes.
- Provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations and mark each assessment on clear, pre-established criteria. Scoring guides should be used for each essential learning outcome.
- Compare each student's performance to preset standards not based on student's achievement compared to other students.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate they have acquired the knowledge or skill expected with proficiency on a standard. Students may be reassessed after following the process established by the building and teacher. At the high school level, students must be referred for RTI before being reassessed.
- For example the following process could be used prior to reassessment:
 - ❖ The student gets a copy of the reassessment agreement from the teacher and completes the "Standards to Reassess" section to choose what standards the student wants to be reassessed on and at what levels.
 - ❖ The student completes the "Preparation Information" by picking a few activities that would help with relearning the material. The student then arranges a meeting with the teacher to discuss the agreement. The teacher may require specific activities to prepare for the reassessment, such as completing missing assignments. Any activities selected by the student or teacher must have evidence that it has been completed.
 - ❖ Together, the student and teacher will decide when, where, and how the student will be reassessed in the "Reassessment Information" section.
 - ❖ Once all of the relearning activities have been completed, the student will show the necessary evidence to the teacher, and both the teacher and student will sign the "Reassessment Approval" section of the agreement.
 - ❖ The student is now ready to be reassessed as described in the "Reassessment Information" section.
 - ❖ The reassessment agreement supports students' learning by:
 - Ensuring that relearning takes place before reassessment.
 - Identifying the specific steps the student must complete to be reassessed.
 - Clarifying the reassessment process for both the student and the teacher.
 - Identifying exactly how the student will be reassessed so there are no surprises.

Benefits

Links the basis for curriculum instruction, assessment and intervention, provides clear focus and makes grading consistent, accurate, meaningful, and supportive of learning.

District Grading Practices

Grading Practice #3

Use appropriate grade calculation.

- Use a 4 point scale of the content standard, describing the level of proficiency, rather than the 100 point scale. (Link to 4 point scoring guide). Grades K-5 will use a 3 point scale and will not have the Advanced level for 2015-2016.
 - ❖ 4.0 The student demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the material by completing advanced application of the material (Advanced)
 - ❖ 3.0 The student has mastered the targeted knowledge and skills for the class. (Proficient/Mastery)
 - ❖ 2.0 The student understands the foundational material that supports the targeted learning, but is still working to master the complex material for the class. (Basic/Partial Mastery)
 - ❖ 1.0 The student is able to demonstrate and understanding of the foundational material for the class with help from the teacher, but still struggles when working independently (Below Basic/Not Mastered)
 - ❖ 0.0 Even with assistance from the teacher, the student shows no understanding of the material. A zero will not be given for missing work until the end of the semester. (Below Basic/ No evidence)
- Eliminate zeroes in grade determination when evidence is missing or as punishment; use alternatives, such as reassessing to determine real achievement or use “I” for Incomplete or Insufficient Evidence.
- **The technology department will enter the grading formula to be used in each class. The most recent summative will be what is in the formula.**
- Grades 6th-8th, grades will be converted to a letter grade at the end of each grading period. Letter grades are used to determine eligibility for extra-curricular activities. Conversion scale is as follows:

4	A+
3.9	A+
3.8	A+
3.7	A+
3.6	A+
3.5	A
3.4	A
3.3	A
3.2	A
3.1	A
3.0	A
2.9	B+
2.8	B+
2.7	B

2.7	B
2.6	B
2.5	B
2.4	C+
2.3	C+
2.2	C
2.1	C
2.0	C
1.9	D+
1.8	D
1.7	D
1.6	D
1.5	F

Benefits:

Accurate grade determination provides the real measure of an individual's achievement and is fair to all learners. The use of a grading scale that is unequal, such as the 100 point scale, distorts the final grade as true indicator of mastery. The smaller equal interval scale will cause grading practices to be more accurate and consistent.

District Grading Practices

Grading Practice #4

Use grading and assessment procedures that support learning.

- Use only evidence from assessments to determine grades.
 - Teachers carefully consider using a variety of the following in determining progress: independent daily written or oral tasks; application of skill; periodic assessments (quizzes, test), performance tasks, and teacher-student questioning.
 - Information from formative assessments should be used to provide feedback on progress towards mastery of the standards and to develop interventions and re-teaching opportunities.
- The information that provides the most accurate depiction of students' learning is the most current information. If students demonstrate that past assessment information no longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information.
- **Homework will not be included in the student's academic score.** Homework is a risk-free chance to experiment and practice with newly acquired skills without penalty.
- Include students in the grading process. Students should track their own progress on identified standards.
- Communicate with students and parents using a standard-based grading/reporting system.
- Assessments should be graded and entered into SISK12 in a timely manner (within 1 week). It is important to provide students with timely feedback and to keep parents informed of student progress. If the class is working on a longer project that will span several days, this can be indicated in the notes section of SISK12.

Benefits:

The goal of frequent assessment is to modify learning. Formative assessments are scored but they are mainly used to track student learning so that appropriate instruction can be planned. Including students in classroom assessment practices and scoring ensure that the expectations are clear to all, promotes student learning and encourages self-assessment and mastery of the standards. Where learning is developmental and will grow with time, repeated practice and assessment provides evidence of progress.

Standard Based Grading Questions & Answers

1. What is Standards Based Grading?

Standards based grading measures the mastery of the learning objectives, or how well students understand the material in class. It is based on a specific set of standards that students need to meet for each grade/content level. Marks are not a comparison of one student to another, but rather a way to measure how well students are doing on grade-level/course level standards. A standards based approach allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful in their educational program.

2. What is the goal of Standards Based Grading?

The primary goal of standards based grading is to improve student achievement by focusing instruction and the alignment of curriculum with the essential learning outcomes. Standards based grading and reporting will provide better communication to students, parents, teachers and administrators on what each student knows and is able to do according to the identified standards and separately assess the influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning.

3. How does Standards Based Grading differ from traditional letter grades?

Standards based grading informs us what students have actually learned and know. Standards based grading measures students' knowledge of grade level content over time by reporting the most recent, consistent level of performance. So, a student might struggle in the beginning of a grading period with new content, but then learn and demonstrate proficient performance by the end of the grading period. In traditional grading, the student's performance for the whole grading period would be averaged and early quiz scores that were low would be averaged together with proficient performance later in the course resulting in a lower grade. In standards based grading, a student who reaches proficiency would be reported proficient and the grade would reflect current performance level.

4. Why change what we have been doing for years?

Traditional grading often measures many different factors such as homework, extra credit, attendance, behavior, etc... and sometimes compares how well students do to their classmates. Standards based grading measures how well an individual student is doing in relation to each grade level standard/skill. Standards based grading gives students and

parents/guardians specific information on what the student does know and can do. It eliminates many of the factors that can distort a traditional grade.

To illustrate the lack of clarity in a traditional grading system, consider three different students, all of whom earned a 75% C in their traditionally graded science class.

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
Homework	100%	50%	75%
Tests & Labs	50%	100%	75%
Overall Grade	75%	75%	75%

While these three students all have identical grades, their understandings of science are likely quite different. Student 1 may have the most questionable understanding of class concepts, as he only averages a 50% on major assessments. Student 2 might very well be quite a gifted scientist, but it seems she's not very good at turning in homework. Student 3 is likely legitimately struggling to master the content, as his consistency suggests this grade is a good representation of what he actually understands.

Standards Based Grading aims to clear up the uncertainty about what grades mean. The goal is to do all we can to make sure that a grade is the best representation of what a student actually knows in the content, and not a measure of anything else.

5. What is the effect on the GPA?

Standards based grading will have no effect on GPA. At the middle school level for 2015-2016, the 4.0 scale will be converted to a letter grade which is used to determine GPA. The GPA will be used to determine eligibility for MSHSAA activities and to determine honor roll students. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, the high school will use the same conversion scale as the middle school. Elementary students will not receive any letter grades.

6. What student evidence is used to determine mastery of the standard?

Summative assessments will be used to determine mastery. An assessment of learning does not necessarily have to be a paper/pencil test. It may be a presentation, oral questioning, demonstration, performance task, product, etc.. The assessment will be any evidence that shows the student has achieved mastery of a particular standard. Students can retest as many times as they need to, to show they know the concept or skill. The goal is for all students to learn the material.

The information that provides the most accurate depiction of students' learning is the most current information. If students demonstrate that past assessment information no

longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information.

7. Why does homework not count in the grade?

Homework should be used to practice a skill. Practice can't be a good measure of what we have already learned, because we engage in practice to learn it in the first place.

To illustrate this, think of a math class where a series of problems have been given as homework after the day's lesson is taught. The teacher assigns the problems so students can practice this new skill. The teacher then uses the results of the homework to determine what additional instruction is necessary. It is not fair to make how well a student does on these problems part of their permanent grade when more instruction may be needed for the student to fully understand.

If we think in terms of an athletic competition, practice is never used as part of the final score in an actual game.

8. What about extra credit?

Extra credit does not measure learning. In a standards based system, students are actually able to demonstrate their learning in many different ways and timeframes. In a traditional system in which points determine everything, extra credit and extra points will influence a grade and not reflect any additional learning. For instance, a student that has a 2.0 on a specific learning goal may have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning at the 3.0 level. However, in a traditional system in which extra points are simply added in to the overall grade, extra points can be earned regardless of whether or not learning may have occurred.

9. What is the timeline for all buildings to be doing Standards Based Grading and using the conversion scale?

During the 2015-2016 school year, all students in grades K-12 will be assessed on each Essential Learning Outcome (standards). Mastery of the ELOs will be marked at each grading interval using a three point scale at the elementary and high school levels. Letter grades will also be given at the high school level. The middle school will mark each ELO using the four point scale and will then convert those scores to a letter grade in order to determine eligibility for MSHSAA activities and honor roll.

During the 2016-2017 school year, all students in grades K-12 will be assessed on each Essential Learning Outcome (standards). Mastery of the ELOs will be marked at each grading interval using a three point scale at the elementary and a four point scale at the

high school and middle school levels. A conversion scale to determine a letter grade at the end of the grading period will be used at the middle school and high school levels.

10. What research has the district used in developing standards bases assessment and grading?

The district has utilized research from the following experts in the field: Dr. Robert Marzano, Ken O'Connor, Jay McTighe, Rick Wormeli, Thomas Guskey, Douglas Reeves and Ricky Stiggins.

GLOSSARY OF STANDARDS BASED GRADING TERMS

Assessment:	Gathering and interpreting information about student achievement using a variety of tools.
Benchmark Assessment:	An assessment that measures a student's achievement level on all standards in a course that will be repeated periodically to check for improvement.
Common Assessment:	The same assessment that is given and graded by common grade level/subject classrooms at about the same time to collect data.
Essential Learning Outcomes:	Statements that define what students should know, understand and be able to do for each course. They are aligned to the Missouri Learning Standards.
Formative Assessment:	Periodic assessment tool for learning that is used to adjust instruction for individual students or a whole class.
Grade:	A simple, clear and concrete summary representation of student achievement based on what a student knows at the end of a period. The number (or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance.
Mastery:	Demonstration of student performance against standard criteria at a pre-established level.

Score: To mark, evaluate, or place a value on a single product as compared to a standard or objective. The number (or letter) “score” given to any student test or performance.

Standards: See Essential Learning Outcomes

Standards Based Grading: Achievement level based on mastery of essential learning outcomes- a grading system where scores denote progress toward the understanding of a specific standard.

Summative Assessment: An evaluation tool designed to show information about a student’s achievement at the end of a period of instruction.