

Standards Based Grading

What is standards-based grading?

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

- The improvement of student achievement of required Pennsylvania targets in all content areas,
- The mastery of defined learning targets instead of the accumulation of points,
- The reporting of student achievement toward meeting learning targets at a given time by reflecting on mounting evidence based on various forms of assessments,
- A record keeping system that provides teachers with information that allows them to adjust learning practices to meet the needs of students, and
- A system that encourages student reflection and responsibility.

What are the purposes of standards-based grading?

The purpose of standards-based grading is to raise student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress toward learning targets.

Standards-based grading aligns grading with the state academic standards as measured by consistent and accurate student achievement data and common criteria for grading. SBG also accurately communicates achievement of learning targets to students, parents and educators. The influence of positive and consistent 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 child's present attainment of the learning targets. Other characteristics are reported separately.

How is standards-based grading different?

The student's grade more accurately represents the progress toward mastery of standards than traditional grading does. Subject areas are subdivided into big ideas related to standards and their respective learning targets 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 target. 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?

- The learning targets are clearly articulated to the students throughout instruction.
- Parents can see which learning targets students have mastered and which ones need reteaching and relearning.

What are the disadvantages of standards-based grading?

- It's a change, and change takes time to build understanding for everyone involved.
- Traditional grading practices are ingrained in the community and they, too, will have to go through the change process.

What is the role of work completed outside of school in SBG?

The purposes for assigning work, regardless of whether it is completed in school or at home, include the following:

- To help students master learning targets.
- To prepare students to learn new material.
- To provide extension and application of skills taught in the class to new situations.
- To integrate and apply many different skills to a larger task.

If the work serves as evidence for a learning target, it will be evaluated and recorded in the gradebook. The student's grade will indicate how well he/she has mastered the content, not whether he/she completes assignments.

Work ethic related to homework will be reflected separately from the academic grade.

Practice homework is designed to help students understand learning targets and better prepare students to learn new material. Students who do not complete this type of work would probably not score as high on later assessments due to lack of practice. Failure to complete assigned work will be reflected in the "Quality of a Learner" section of the report card.

Evidence completed outside of school is used as an opportunity for students to integrate knowledge taught in class and to demonstrate extension and application of learning target knowledge and skills. Failure to turn in this type of homework may negatively impact a learning target grade not as a punitive measure, but rather because a key piece of evidence needed to verify a certain level of student understanding is missing.

How does a standards-based report card improve teaching and learning?

Knowing where students are in their progress toward meeting standards-based learning targets is crucial for planning and carrying out classroom instruction. Teachers teach to the needs of their students. The new grading system is designed to give teachers more information about the student's progress in meeting the level of proficiency required by each standard. In addition, teachers share the standards with students and parents, helping them to better understand the learning that needs to take place.

How does the new report card help improve my understanding of my child's learning?

Based on assessments directly related to the learning targets throughout the grading period, teachers, parents and students are made aware of progress toward the learning targets and can work together to enhance achievement. Standards are an effective way of giving students and parents the targets for concept mastery when they are in school. Doug Reeves (*101 Questions and Answers about Standards, Assessment, and Accountability*, 2004) makes this point in the following quote:

"By comparing one child's performance to a clear standard, parents, children and teachers all know precisely what is expected. Every time a student attempts a task, the performance is compared to the standard, not to other children's performances. The most important advantages for children and families are fairness, clarity, and improved learning."

Why does SBG use most recent assessments vs. averaging?

Every student starts a grading period with a certain amount of background knowledge, some accurate and some not, related to a topic/learning target. Through assessments during the grading period, teachers are able to determine students' levels of achievement of the learning targets. Since the goal is to document each student's level of achievement based on learning targets, averaging all scores throughout the marking period dilutes the information, underestimates the students' ending performance, and corrupts the determination of whether or not the student has achieved the targets.

Do we report out on the student's proficiency for the end of the year target, or is the grade based on proficiency for that time of year?

The PA academic standards give us benchmarks along with an achievement timeline. The report card grade is summative information about the level of proficiency of the learning targets that are taught each trimester. Therefore, the grade for each trimester communicates a student's progress as compared to where we would expect him/her to be at that moment in time. By the end of the year/course/grade level, students are expected to be proficient or advanced for each standard.

Doesn't SBG lead to grade inflation?

If a grade truly represents the level of mastery of standards, the grades students have earned represent the level of their understanding of the course material. It should provide an accurate picture of the student's performance, neither inflated nor deflated.

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 better in later education levels such as college when implemented with fidelity both for instruction and assessment. The works of people such as Popham, Reeves, Marzano, Pickering, McTighe, Wiggins, Stiggins, Guskey, Brookhart, O'Connor, and the *High Schools That Work Breaking Ranks* program are good sources of evidence.

Suggested Reading

Guskey (2007/08). The Rest of the Story. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 28-35.

Kallick and Costa. *Habits of Mind*.

Marzano (2006). *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work*.

O'Connor (2002). *How to Grade for Learning*.

Scriffiny (2008). Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading.

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/Seven_Reasons_for_Standards-Based_Grading.aspx).

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

Please note: This information was adapted (with permission) from the Quakertown Community School District.