



# Excelsior Springs

School District 40

# ASSESSMENT & GRADING HANDBOOK

October 2011

**MISSION STATEMENT**  
*Working together to help  
all children learn.*



# Professional Learning Communities Into 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 4 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?**

*Links to District guiding documents (click to view):*

[CSIP](#)

[DAP](#)

[PD Plan](#)

[All Things PLC](#)

## Purpose of Standards-Based Grading

The purpose of standards-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 more recent evidence of learning.
- Multiple methods of grade calculation are used to determine grades.

See O'Connor's chart: "Traditional Grading System Versus Standards-Based Grading System" on page 8

## 2006 and prior:

- ❖ Work began with all buildings identifying GLEs or Topics for standards-based grading and assessment. Pinnacle Grading Software was purchased to be used to report student's progress and success on standards.
- ❖ Elementary began standards based reporting using GLEs with Pinnacle software.
- ❖ Middle School/High School investigated but initiative of utilizing standards-based reporting failed. Reported problems with Pinnacle.

## 2007-2010:

*(Revisited in 2008 and 2010) District Achievement Plan (DAP) included:*

- ❖ District will utilize grade book and grade card software which promotes standards based assessment and instruction. This allows all stakeholders to view the specific skills or concepts a student has mastered or need improvement. Instruction can then be focused to meet individual student needs.
- ❖ District will identify essential content and ensure the essential content is covered by all teachers. Instructional time will be protected to cover the essential content.
- ❖ Curriculum maps for each subject/grade level will be devised and/or reviewed annually.
- ❖ Implement scientifically-based research strategies.

## 2009-2010:

- ❖ Changed to Power School as the district grade book for grades 6-12 with the understanding that when the upgrade occurred we would be moving to a standards-based reporting system as originally planned in the 2007-2010 DAP. Power School would then be used K-12.

## Summer 2010:

- ❖ Power School upgrade included standards-based reporting capabilities.
- ❖ Began the development of Assessment and Grading Cohort.
- ❖ Administrative team discussion on the progress of Essential Standards identified.

## 2010-2011:

- ❖ Began Assessment and Grading Cohort.
- ❖ Developed draft vision for the District on Assessment and Grading.
- ❖ Essential Standards and curriculum mapping revisited, developed or re-evaluated.
- ❖ Created disequilibrium with staff on current grading practices and each building developed an action plan for standards-based grading and assessment as outlined in the District Achievement Plan.
- ❖ Members of cohort pilot standards-based grading.
- ❖ Cohort members will developed reporting scales (rubrics) to grade standards.

## 2011-2014:

- ❖ Develop and implement scoring rubrics.
- ❖ Continually review, revise, and refine essential standards and curriculum maps to further align written, taught, and tested curriculum.
- ❖ Develop and/or revise quality assessments.
- ❖ Standards-based classroom instruction and reporting through professional learning, coaching, monitoring, and evaluation to communicate student learning.
- ❖ Students will track their own progress on identified standards.
- ❖ Grades will be consistent, accurate, meaningful, and supportive of learning.

# 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 rubrics.
- 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.
- Base grades/scores on individual achievement not group scores.
- 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 should not be included in the student's 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, standards-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, and personal communication) to evaluate student achievement on grade/course level standards.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate they have acquired the knowledge or skill expected with proficiency on a standard.
- Gather evidence using quality assessments.
- Organize and report evidence of learning by standards/learning goals.
- Provide clear descriptions of achievement expectations and mark each assessment on clear, pre-established criteria.
- Compare each student's performance to preset standards not based on student's achievement compared to other students.

### ***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 rubric)
- Use appropriate calculation methods (mode, mean, most recent) and professional judgement based on evidence of learning.
- Eliminate zeros 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.
- At the secondary level, grade point average (GPA) will be determined by converting the 4.0 scale to a letter grade.
- Secondary scale to convert a 4.0 score to a letter grade:

**A: 3.75 – 4.00**

**A-: 3.50 – 3.74**

**B+: 3.25 – 3.49**

**B: 3.00 – 3.24**

**B-: 2.75 – 2.99**

**C+: 2.50 – 2.74**

**C: 2.00 – 2.49**

**C-: 1.75 – 1.99**

**D+: 1.50 – 1.74**

**D: 1.25 – 1.49**

**D-: 1.00 – 1.24**

**F: 0.00 – 0.99**

Rationale: This conversion scale sets a clear standard for each letter grade. In order to receive credit for a class, a student must, with help, show an understanding all of the foundational skills taught in a class. Under this scale, the C range shows that the student understands all of the foundational skills without help, and the B range requires a student to master all of the complex, targeted knowledge in the class. Finally, to receive an A- or A, the student must show an in-depth understanding of the material that goes beyond what was explicitly taught in the class.

### *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 a 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 skills; periodic assessments (quizzes, tests), 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 reteaching 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 standards-based grading/reporting system.

### *Benefits:*

The goal of frequent assessment is to modify learning. Formative assessments are scored and can be recorded but 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

### *The Role of Formative and Summative Assessment*

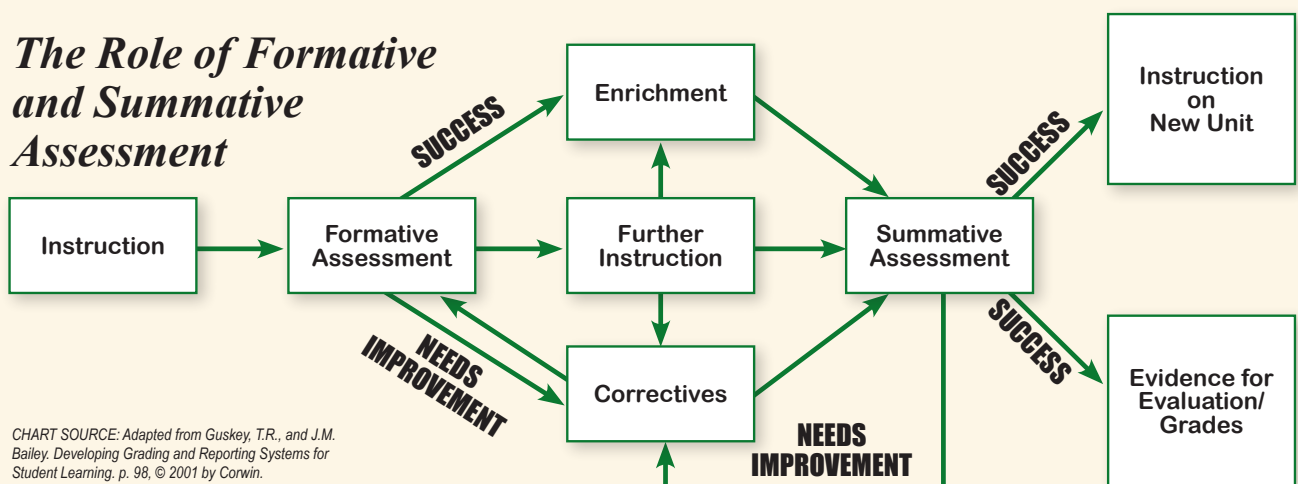


CHART SOURCE: Adapted from Guskey, T.R., and J.M. Bailey, *Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning*, p. 98, © 2001 by Corwin.

# Traditional vs. Standards Based Grading:

Traditional Grading System Versus Standards-Based Grading System	Standards-Based
<p><b>Traditional</b></p> <p>Based on assessment methods. One grade per subject.</p> <p>Based on % system; often norm-referenced, criteria not clear.</p> <p>Use an uncertain mix of achievement, attitude, effort and behavior. Use penalties and extra credit.</p> <p>Include group scores.</p> <p>Score – and include – everything – regardless of purpose.</p> <p>Include every score regardless of when it was collected.</p> <p>Grades calculated using the mean.</p> <p>Assessments vary in quality. Some evidence comes only from teacher recollection.</p> <p>The teacher makes decisions about grading and announces these decisions to students.</p>	<p>Based on learning goals with a grade for each.</p> <p>Criterion-referenced and proficiency-based using a limited number of levels with criteria and targets known to all.</p> <p>Measure only achievement; behaviors reported separately. No penalties or bonuses given.</p> <p>Includes individual evidence only.</p> <p>Use only summative assessments for grading.</p> <p>Emphasize the more recent evidence of learning</p> <p>Use median, mode and professional judgment to <i>determine</i> grades.</p> <p>Use only quality assessment and carefully record data.</p> <p>Discusses all aspects with students.</p>
	<p>© O'Connor 2008. <a href="http://www.solution-tree.com">www.solution-tree.com</a> Reproducible.</p>



# Grading and Assessment Definitions

<b>Assessment:</b>	Gathering and interpreting information about student achievement using a variety of tools.
<b>Benchmark Assessment:</b>	An assessment that measures a student's achievement level on all standards in a course that will be repeated periodically to check for improvement.
<b>Common Assessment:</b>	The same assessment that is given and graded by common grade level/subject classrooms at about the same time to collect data.
<b>Formative Assessment:</b>	Periodic assessment tool for learning that is used to adjust instruction for individual students or a whole class.
<b>Grade:</b>	A simple, clear, and concrete summary representation of student achievement based on what a student knows at the end of a given time period. The number (or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance.
<b>Mastery:</b>	Demonstration of student performance against standard criteria at a pre-established level.
<b>Score:</b>	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.
<b>Standards:</b>	Statement that describes what and/or how well students are expected to understand and perform.
<b>Standards-based Grading:</b>	Achievement level based on mastery of essential standards—a grading system where scores denote progress toward the understanding of a specific standard.
<b>Summative Assessment:</b>	An evaluation tool designed to show information about a student's achievement at the end of a period of instruction.
<b>Test:</b>	An assessment intended to measure the student's knowledge or other abilities.
<b>4.0 Rubric:</b>	A grading tool used to provide feedback on an identified learning goal. The score signifies the knowledge a student has towards that learning goal. It moves from simple (2.0) to more complex (3.0) with a score of 4.0 requiring synthesis and analysis. A score of 3.0 is the proficient level of mastering the targeted learning goal.

# Questions & Answers

## **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.

## **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 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.

## **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.

In standards-based grading, in most courses factors like attendance, effort, work habits, and attitude will be reported separately in order to give a more accurate report of student progress.

## **Everyone knows what an A-B-C-D-F and 100 point scale stands for. Why change?**

According to the 2007-2010 District Achievement Plan, the district will provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum with scientifically-based research strategies that will improve achievement. This goal entails the use of grade book software which promotes standards-based assessment and instruction allowing all stakeholders to view the specific skills or concepts a student has mastered or need improvement.

Traditional grading often measures many different factors and compares how well students do to their classmates. Standards-based grading measures how well an individual student is doing in relation to the grade level standard/skill, not the work of other students. In the 100 point system, the question becomes "100 percent of what?" We need criteria to have more consistency and accuracy about what students know and are able to do. When a percentage system is applied, it can be misleading. 100 percent correctness on a set of very easy questions is very different than a slightly lower percentage on a set of difficult items. A 100 point scale does not consider difficulty of work and leads to an inaccurate measure of student learning relative to a specific learning goals. Grades must be accurate and consistent to be useful. The use of a grading scale that is unequal, such as the 100 point scale, distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. The smaller equal interval scale will cause grading practices to be more accurate and consistent.

## **What is the effect on the GPA?**

Standards-based grading will have no effect on GPA. At the high school level, the 4.0 scale will be converted to a letter grade which is used to determine GPA.

# Questions & Answers

## **What student evidence determines grades?**

Teachers carefully consider the following in determining progress: independent daily written or oral tasks; application of skills; periodic assessments (quizzes, tests), performance tasks, and teacher-student questioning. Several different types of assessments will be available. Students can retest as many times as they need to, to show they know the concept or skill. Consistent descriptive feedback will be given to let students know what improvements are needed and what they are doing right.

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.

## **Why is averaging scores to determine a grade not the best method?**

Averaging does not always provide an accurate description of what students have learned. Teachers must consider other central tendencies such as median, mode, or new learning replacing old.

## **What is the problem with including zeros in grades?**

A zero has a profound effect when combined with the practice of averaging. Zeros skew the average. In a standards-based grading system students earn credit for demonstrated learning. If a student submits no work or demonstrates no learning, then no credit is assigned. Late work and missing assignments will be dealt with separately. At the high school level, students missing an assignment will earn an incomplete until the assignment is turned in.

## **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.

## **When will standards-based grading and assessment become district-wide ?**

Each department and grade span are at different places on the standards-based assessment continuum. Each building is creating an action plan that will move them towards total adoption of standards-based grading by the year 2013.

## **What research has the district used in developing standards-based 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, Rick Stiggins

# Resources and References

- Ainsworth, L. (2003). *Power standards: Identifying the standards that matter the most*. Englewood, CO: Advanced Learning Press.
- DuFour, R., Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Guskey, T. R. (Ed.). (2009). *Practical solutions for serious problems in standards-based grading*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Marzano, R. J. (2006). *Classroom assessment & grading that work*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. J. (2010). *Formative assessment & standards-based grading: Classroom strategies that work*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.
- Marzano, R. J. (2000). *Transforming classroom grading*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. J., & Haystead, M. W. (2008). *Making standards useful in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- O'Connor, Ken. (2010). *A repair kit for grading: 15 fixes for broken grades*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- O'Connor, Ken. (2009). *How to grade for learning: K-12 (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Reeves, D. (2011). *Elements of grading: A guide to effective practice*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Stiggins, R., Arter, J., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S. (2006). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right-using it well*. Portland, OR: Educational Testing Service.