

Standards-Based Grading: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Standards-Based Grading?

Standards-based grading measures the mastery of the learning objectives, or how well students understand the content in class. It is a method of reporting what students have learned and how they demonstrated their learning of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Standards specify what all students should know and be able to do by the end of the school year. A standards-based approach allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful.

What is the purpose of Standards-Based Grading?

The purpose of standards-based grading is to improve student learning by focusing on instruction and the alignment of curriculum with the essential standards. It provides an accurate measurement and reporting process on students' proficiency in meeting those standards. Standards-based grading and reporting will provide better communication to students, parents, teachers and administrators on the students' academic abilities.

How does Standards-Based Grading differ from traditional letter grades?

Standards-based grading informs us what students have learned and know. Standards-based grading measures a student's knowledge of grade level content over time by reporting the most recent, consistent level of performance. For example, a student might struggle in the beginning of a grading period with new content but may demonstrate proficiency by the end of the grading period. In traditional grading, the student's performance for the whole grading period would be averaged, and early assessment scores that were low would be averaged together with proficient assessment scores. The result of the scores averaged would be a lower grade. When a percentage system is applied, it can be misleading. In standards-based grading, a student who reaches proficiency would be reported proficient, and the grade would reflect current performance level.

Why change?

Traditional grading often measures many different factors such as homework, extra credit, attendance, behavior etc....and sometimes compares how well students do in relation to their classmates. Standards-based grading measures

how well an individual student is doing in relation to each grade-level standard or skill. Standards-based grading gives students and parents specific information on what the student knows and what the student can do. It eliminates many of the factors that can distort the final traditional grade as a true indicator of mastery. It clears up the uncertainty about what the grade means. The goal is to do all we can to make sure that a grade is the best representation of how well a student knows the content. Goals 2 and 6 of our Fisd Strategic Plan inspire and require us to make this shift for students.

Q. Why can't my child "score" past the expected target each nine weeks on the report card?

A. The quickest explanation is that the target expected level each nine weeks (noted on each report card standard) for each progression, such as a 1.5 or a 2.0, etc., is equivalent to a child receiving a 100 for mastering that nine week's skills. Just as in a traditional gradebook we did not go past a 100, the same would hold true in a standards based setting. A child who has mastered all the skills on the progression would receive the targeted level for that nine weeks, just as they would have received a 100.

We cannot report on skills covered outside of that nine weeks because the teacher has not explicitly taught them at that point in the year yet.

For students showing mastery on skills in learning progressions more quickly, their learning will be extended to skills on other progressions in that particular nine weeks where mastery may still be coming along. They will be asked to show their learning at the highest level possible through multiple forms of evidence, therefore ensuring students are not just moving along but truly mastering skills that are fundamental to success in future standards. Students will have opportunities and be asked to make choices about how they would like to show what they know and prove their learning as they inch towards mastery of the skills. This enhances critical thinking and student ownership of the learning standards at the highest level possible. It is amazing what kids can come up with!