



**EAGLE COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Standards-Based Grading FAQs

The questions and answers herein represent a collection of commonly asked questions in regards to Standards-Based Grading (SBG) assembled from school-based community information nights. Similar topics and questions have been consolidated. Topics or questions related to extremely specific or student-sensitive information have been omitted. If you have additional questions, please contact your school principal or district leadership for more information.

General Questions

1. Why are we switching to Standards-Based Grading?

- a. Our district needs a consistent grading system for all schools. Traditional grading practices include elements that don't speak to content/subject mastery. Standards-Based Grading empowers students to be more successful by providing content-specific feedback that encourages them to improve.

2. What research supports this method of grading?

- a. Along with anecdotal experience, leading educational experts including:
 - Joe Feldman, *Grading for Equity*
 - Building Equitable Learning Environments Network
 - Gary Howard, *You Can't Lead Where You Won't Go*
 - Benner, Brown, and Jeffrey, *Elevating Student Voice in Education*
 - Tammy Heflebower, *A School Leader's Guide to Standards-Based Grading*, foreword by Rober Marzano

3. Is grading subjective?

- a. Traditional grading practices are highly subjective, with points awarded for things like attendance, homework, and participation inconsistently between classrooms. Standards-Based Grading assigns grades that tie student achievement to specific topics within subject areas. This practice works to make grading practices more objective and consistent for all classrooms.

4. How did we arrive at our conversion scale? Will we eventually not convert grades into letters?

- a. We looked at the grading systems and scales used in school districts in Colorado, including Jefferson County (the second largest school district in the state), Roaring Fork, and Summit County and worked to find a conversion scale that works best for our school district.
- b. As schools implement Standards-Based Grading and the 0-4 scale, the conversion to letter grades will no longer happen. Transcripts and college applications will be converted by the receiving institution.

5. This approach is great for K-8. Why is high school also moving away from traditional grading?

- a. In the interest of a consistent and aligned grading system for a student's academic career with Eagle County School District, high school grade levels must also be part of Standards-Based Grading. Standards-Based Grading is a high-impact practice in K-12 education.

6. How does Standards-Based Grading impact Grade Point Averages (GPAs)?

- a. Standards-Based Grading informs GPAs very similarly to traditional grading. Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment classes will still be weighted. See below for a consolidated grade scale for course grades.

Consolidated Grade Scale for Course Grades

Proficiency Level	Course Grade	GPA	Weighted GPA	Credit / Eligibility
Exemplary	4	4.0	5.0	YES
	3.5	4.0	5.0	YES
Meeting	3	3.0	4.0	YES
	2.5	3.0	4.0	YES
Developing	2	2.0	3.0	YES
	1.5	1.5	1.5	NO
Beginning	1	1.0	1.0	NO
	0.5	0.5	0.5	NO
No Evidence	0	0	0	NO

Implementation Related

7. What is the plan to implement this system in the high school?

- a. For the 22-23 school year, our two traditional high schools have taken a first step toward Standards-Based Grading. Starting with the 23-24 school year, traditional high schools will be implementing Standards-Based Grading just as elementary and middle schools have this year. We are using the pilot programs at Red Canyon and VSSA this year to make adjustments as needed.
- b. Below are practices BMHS and EVHS have implemented this year:
 - Eliminated zeros and extra credit.
 - Aligned department gradebook expectations in regards to quantity, entries, assessments, processes, and deadlines.
 - Use of rubrics to assess proficiency on standards.
 - Implemented 50% percentage scale aligned to the standards-based 0-4 scale.

8. The implementation of Standards-Based Grading feels like it's happening too fast.

- a. While the district-wide implementation started during the 2020-21 school year, some of our schools have been implementing Standards-Based Grading or similar practices for many years. In an effort to provide consistency and transparency across the district, all schools are now working to align instruction and assessment. This work is being paced to match the capacity of each school, but it's important for us to maintain district-level expectations while also providing district level support to keep things fair and consistent.
- b. [Watch our "This is Happening Too Fast!" video for more information.](#)

9. Did teachers have a say in this decision?

- a. In March of 2021, all teachers trained on grading practices and were surveyed at the end. Ninety-five percent of ECSD teachers agreed that we should align grading practices across our district. Teachers provided input on which practices to prioritize. Our Grading Committee, which consistently works on this subject, includes teacher representatives from across the district, grade levels, and subject areas, as well as specialists and leadership team members.

10. Are you talking to teachers who are piloting or not piloting? What are they saying?

- a. Yes, the Grading Committee includes teachers who are piloting Standards-Based Grading and they have provided feedback that assists the implementation process.
- b. In Wednesday professional development meetings and department/grade level meetings, all teachers are invited to provide feedback and ask questions. Their comments and questions are important to inform district leaders where additional training is needed. This open dialogue has led to positive conversations with teachers that show an increased buy-in and understanding from them, as well as constructive criticism that we can adapt and learn from moving forward.

11. Are you talking to students? What are they saying? How do they feel?

- a. Classroom dialogue is changing for the better. Students are realizing scores are about the learning, not an economy where points and grades are the currency. While initial conversations may not have been as positive, as teachers become more comfortable with and knowledgeable about the process, students are following suit.

12. It seems that Standards-Based Grading procedures are not being implemented consistently. What kind of training did teachers receive?

- a. Schools are in different places in this process, and even within schools, some teachers have more experience or knowledge with Standards-Based Grading. Our overall goal is to provide a more consistent grading system in the district, but we understand that will take time. Teachers are working with their instructional coaches to fully understand this change. Numerous professional development opportunities have been and will continue to be provided to teachers throughout the district.

13. Parents have been informed on the implementation of Standards-Based Grading & Learning, but have had no say on its implementation. Will schools and the district support a parent-led group to gather feedback and present recommendations?

- a. Superintendent Qualman's door is always open and will happily schedule meetings for parents with feedback or concerns. Before the implementation of Standards-Based Grading in Eagle County School District, there was no consistency in grading practices or philosophies across the 18 schools. There are times to seek community input, and there are times when we need to rely on research and educational pedagogy. Parent feedback informs the implementation process, so we hope to continue the dialogue so we can be responsive to irregularities and bumps in the road.

14. Are teachers receiving training prior to implementation?

- a. Staff members are receiving training as well as ongoing professional development and resources. Each school is handling this implementation slightly differently, and so there is not a specific number of hours dedicated to this work. Staff members are supported in this work through Teacher Leaders, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and district outreach.

15. Will you give teachers guidance for numbers of summative grades per semester?

- a. Yes, but teachers have professional discretion to enter assignments in the gradebook as they see fit. This varies by grade level, content area, and length of the unit or term.

16. Teachers seem to be grading their own way. How does that fit into Standards-Based Grading?

- a. Consistency is our goal, and moving forward teachers will teach and grade to the same standards using consistent assessment practices.

17. This new system has caused anxiety for some students. How can schools work to address their concerns and reduce the stress associated with this change?

- a. In many ECSD schools, Standards-Based Grading isn't a big change. For some, the change feels more significant. That may cause some students to experience cognitive dissonance or stress as they get used to the new system. It's important to talk about the change, remind students of the purpose, and show them how Standards-Based Grading is intended to help them be more successful. Students are encouraged to talk with their teachers and principals about the implementation process and point out when something isn't working.

18. Can schools host family support nights to help parents learn how to support kids?

- a. Yes, we will continue to provide district- and school-level support as needed to parents, teachers and students. If you are interested in your school providing a support night, contact your principal.

Achieving a 4, Assessment Related

19. How do students achieve their grades? Is it an average of assignments?

- a. In Standards-Based Grading, students receive a 0-4 score for each standard found within an assignment or assessment. Multiple standards can be included within a single assessment. Teachers assess each standard using a whole number integer, ie. 1, 2, 3, 4. As a default, the most recent assessment of a standard is used to determine the score for that standard. If the most recent assessment does not represent the body of evidence on the whole, teachers use their professional expertise to determine the final score on a particular standard. Those standards' scores are then averaged to determine the student's grade for the course.

20. What grade is expected from my child at this time?

- a. This system should demonstrate where your child is currently in regards to content mastery. From there, students can work with their teachers to continue to grow their knowledge. Long-term, we want all students to strive for and achieve the highest grades they are able to attain, understanding that it will take time to get there.

21. Are 4s achievable? How do you get a 4?

- a. Yes. 4s are earned when a standard is met and there is demonstration of application, creativity, or connection of the standard.

22. What does the difference look like between an assessment that earns a 3 and ones that earns a 4? Especially in something like math, where you are solving for an answer and you either got it correct or not.

- a. When designed appropriately, assessments have task items that contain opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of the skills and concepts of standards at all levels of proficiency. Tasks or question items are written to challenge students to demonstrate understanding of supporting skills and to demonstrate mastery. Each task or question can measure a specific skill (or multiple) needed to show mastery of a standard. The questions students answer correctly and the depth of their response determine the level of proficiency the student receives. If a student answers the questions designed to meet the expectations of a skill at the level 3 proficiency, then the student earns a 3 on that standard. If the student answers questions that exceed expectations of the skill at the level 4 proficiency, then the student earns a 4 on that standard.

- b. The score of the assessment is not an average or total number correct, rather the assessment is scored based on the standards and skills that each task or question measures.
- c. [Grade 3 Math Assessment Example](#)

23. Are teachers supposed to provide guidance to assist students in achieving a 4?

- a. Absolutely. A 4 can be earned through consistent and independently demonstrated proficiency of a standard, but this does not mean the student is not supported and encouraged in their learning. Working with a teacher, students can gain a better understanding of what they need to do to demonstrate that proficiency.

24. Why do some teachers say they don't give 4s, or give assignments with "no opportunity to get a 4?"

- a. This is an incomplete statement. On rare occasions, some standards are very basic and serve as building blocks for more complex tasks or conceptual understanding. The statement should end with a comma and an explanation of when the 4 will be attainable and why it isn't necessary in a specific task or assignment.

25. Can grades consist of coursework only, or do tests have to be included?

- a. Teachers collect a body of evidence to assess students on various standards. These may not always include tests, but can, as well as projects, papers, quizzes, and other assessment styles.

26. Why is there no extra credit?

- a. Because students have the opportunity to work with teachers on retakes and chances to demonstrate mastery of content. Extra Credit will no longer be offered as it would promote the idea of chasing points as a transaction.

27. Will you standardize the retake policy? Who do we notify if a teacher is not providing the opportunity to retake assessments?

- a. Schools and departments are working towards more consistency, but there will be variation based on grade levels and subject matter. Learning is a process, and Standards-Based Grading is designed to honor that process and give students the opportunity to improve without penalty. Retakes are not unlimited, and teachers can offer them when they make sense in the scope of the unit.

28. Are you concerned students will get used to retakes in high school and be hurt by this redo concept later since they will not have this opportunity in college?

- a. No. Mistakes happen in the real world, and life is a continuous learning process, so understanding that and accepting it to improve is an important lesson to be learned. While students could learn to rely on later attempts to demonstrate mastery, they will soon learn early and often attempts to demonstrate knowledge let them receive feedback and manage their time responsibly.
- b. Students who strive for 4s and set themselves up to excel in high school will be better prepared for the rigorous course load of colleges.

29. If a student shows mastery of a standard in September and earns a 4, are they continually tested on that standard? Does only the last assignment count? What happens if they later earn a 2 on a standard they previously earned a 4 on? Are later assessments weighted more than early ones?

- a. All student work contributes to a **body of evidence** of student learning on a standard. Students are given multiple opportunities over the course of a unit to demonstrate their learning. Although

a student may demonstrate a 4 level on a standard at the beginning of a learning period, they will be assessed on the standard more than once. Grades are calculated using the most recent assessment recorded in the gradebook. PowerSchool provides opportunities to access the body of evidence showing how a student has performed over time on a particular standard. If the most recent assessment does not represent the body of evidence on the whole, teachers use their professional expertise to determine the final grade on a particular standard. It is also important to understand that some standards are assessed in a unit. Some standards are assessed over the course of the semester, or even the school year. They are assessed over longer periods of time, but not necessarily continually.

30. Why is my child not getting As (4s) anymore?

- a. Standards-Based Grading assesses students based on their understanding of standards rather than assigning points to earn letter grades. Students are assessed on the level of proficiency of the skills and concepts they demonstrate. In a traditional grading system, a student may earn points for behaviors and extra credit that do not represent their understanding of content standards. In Standards-Based Grading systems, students demonstrate proficiency of a grade level standard as well as being able to transfer and apply skills to new or real world situations in order to earn a 4. Students are not expected to begin a unit of study demonstrating a 4 level of proficiency. The system is designed to provide multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning over the course of a unit. As skills and concepts are taught, students receive academic feedback and have opportunities to revise their work to earn a 4.

PowerSchool, Reporting Related

31. How does my student check their GPA for being able to participate in sports?

- a. If logging into the PowerSchool parent portal online, the GPA is shown directly below the Grades and Attendance chart on the parent PowerSchool portal main screen.
- b. On the PowerSchool app on a mobile device, GPA is displayed in the upper left corner of the Dashboard screen.

32. If Standards-Based Grading is a process and builds upon concepts for a final grade, how do I recognize areas of struggle with my child sooner?

- a. Grades should be entered into PowerSchool throughout the semester and should share more information as far as what was graded. Instead of seeing a grade on Quiz 2 or Test 4, information about what was taught and learned should be included as well as what the expectations were.

33. Grades still show in PowerSchool as letters. How will we know how that compares to the 0-4 scale? When will it show 0-4?

- a. The schools that are currently doing the full implementation of Standards-Based Grading have already switched to a 0-4 scale. For those that are slowly making the transition it will depend on the path forward, but as the shift is made we encourage you to contact schools directly for a better understanding of the timeline.

34. How can a student know their grade if teachers have not entered grades since September?

- a. They can't. Please contact the teacher or the principal so that they can address the issue directly. Grades should be entered in a timely manner to provide feedback to students.

35. How will leadership respond to student stress due to inconsistent and inaccurate grades posted on PowerSchool?

- a. This is a change and we will continue to support our students as we move through it. We will also work with teachers to help them better understand the process and ways in which they can help to reduce that stress on students by entering more grades into PowerSchool.

College Admissions Related

36. How will this impact the college admissions process?

- a. Colleges and their admissions officers are well-versed in the differences in school grading systems and have processes in place to be able to accurately compare applications they receive to determine admission eligibility. Colleges look at an index that includes GPA as one point in a collection of other information. See more information [here](#) from the Great Schools Partnership.

37. How will this impact college-level classes in high school?

- a. Advanced Placement (AP) classes are through ECSD and are assessed on a 0-4 scale with the AP standards. Dual Enrollment (DE) classes are through Colorado Mountain College. There are several DE teachers piloting Standards-Based Grading in their classes this year. Because DE classes are through CMC, we have to find a middle ground that meets the needs of both institutions.

38. Does this put our kids at a disadvantage when applying to colleges?

- a. Based on Superintendent Qualman's conversations with admissions officers, colleges look at a matrix of different things when considering applications, including GPA and classes on the student's transcript. These professionals are not as interested in weighted GPAs as many might think, and instead consider what classes students took and how they challenged themselves, such as college-level courses while in high school.

39. Will there be a valedictorian? It seems like many students will have the same GPA.

- a. Yes, there will be a valedictorian. Since GPAs work the same way they do now, and we will still have weighted grades for advanced classes, the GPA and class ranking are not impacted by Standards-Based Grading.

40. I want my child to take AP courses to earn a weighted GPA. When are the AP class placement tests for 8th graders? And what if currently in private school?

- a. There are no placement tests for AP courses. AP Human Geography is the only Advanced Placement course currently encouraged for freshmen.
- b. If a student is in private school or transfers from out of district, the student's counselor looks at their transcript and determines if they have had the appropriate pre-requisite classes just as they would with any ECSD student.

41. What colleges/universities have been consulted on our Standards-Based Grading system?

- a. Superintendent Qualman attended a college fair with admissions representatives from a variety of schools. Some of the schools that have provided impressions and feedback on the ECSD Standards-Based Grading system include University of Colorado – Boulder, Penn State University, University of Missouri–Columbia, Regis University, USC, University of Southern California, University of Maryland, American University, St. Lawrence University, and St. John's College.

42. How can a student go to Colorado State University or Colorado University with a 2.0?

- a. A student that has a 2.0 will struggle to get into certain schools and would also struggle at those schools. Standards-Based Grading will not lower a student's grade unless that student is unable to demonstrate mastery of specific content, in which case the student may need more academic support to be successful at the college level. We think it is better to determine these needs prior to a student stepping foot on a college campus.

Miscellaneous

43. Doesn't school teach more than just content? If there's no value to doing and turning in assignments, aren't we missing valuable lessons like accountability and responsibility?

- a. Absolutely. Essential life skills will continue to be taught and provided feedback on, but the course grade itself will focus on mastery of content.

44. This was tried at an elementary school for a stint, and then it was abandoned. Why try it again?

- a. Elementary schools transitioned to standards-based grade reporting about 15 years ago. The way that has looked has changed over the years, and we are now working to align practices across the district. With district-wide support and consistency we are confident that these practice's will equate to success for all schools.

45. How do students and parents differentiate between standards that are evaluated over time and those that have a short window?

- a. Standards are assessed more than once during a particular unit of study. Mastery standards are the high-priority concepts and skills that will be taught and assessed over the course of a semester or school year. If you have questions about which standards are being taught and how often they will be assessed, your classroom teacher can help. Understand that specific standards are not continually evaluated, but rather over the course of the semester and even the school year.

46. Students that "meet standards" in English Language Arts are not getting constructive feedback, while those who are "not meeting" standards are getting constructive feedback returned. How can students who "meet the standards" excel without feedback?

- a. Teachers should be working with all of their students to help them achieve greater content mastery. If this is not happening, you should discuss with your principal who can address each specific situation.

47. Standards-Based Grading seems like promoting mediocrity.

- a. Standards-based learning and grading promotes high expectations for all by providing detailed feedback and reporting on students' academic proficiency of grade level standards.

48. What about a student that has a learning disability, is on an IEP or 504 Plan, or has anxiety around testing? What impacts do these have on and how are these impacted by Standards-Based Grading?

- a. Students with IEPs and 504 Plans will have appropriate instructional accommodations to support them in meeting the grade level standards. Meeting or exceeding grade level standards is the goal for all students, including students learning English and with learning differences.