District 65 Standards Based Grading and Reporting Handbook

Family Guide to Standards Based Learning and Grading

August 2026

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Introduction:
District 65 Standards-Based Grading
Year Two

District 65 is excited to begin our second year of standards-based grading and reporting in kindergarten through 8th grade. This approach, which began in the 2024–25 school year, gives students and families clearer information about learning progress and habits that support success.

In middle school, the biggest change families will notice is that report cards no longer give one overall course grade (like a “B” in Math 6). Instead, report cards now show how students are doing in each part of the subject. For example, in math you’ll see progress reported separately for geometry, expressions and equations, number systems, ratios and proportions, and statistics and probability. This gives families a much more detailed picture of their child’s learning.

With this shift, families get information that is:

- **Meaningful** – shows both strengths and areas where support is needed.
- **Accurate** – reflects how your child is doing on grade-level standards.
- **Actionable** – helps families and teachers work together to support growth.

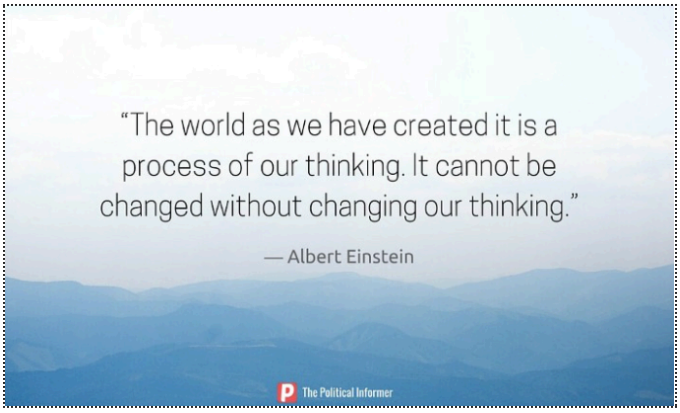
Report cards also include a section on learning habits—the skills and behaviors students use to learn, such as preparation, participation, and collaboration. These are important habits that set students up for long-term success.

As we move into year two, we are already seeing benefits of standards-based grading:

- Report card indicators are closely connected to how students perform on the state assessment (IAR).
- Grades more accurately show what students know and can do, reducing the grade inflation that sometimes happened in the past.
- Classroom assessments now give a better picture of how students are likely to perform on state tests.
- Teachers across schools are working together to make sure grading is consistent and fair.

This handbook includes more details about these changes and how to read your child's report card. To learn more, please visit the District 65 website or reach out to your school leader.

Section 1: D65 Vision and Purpose of Grading/Reporting



D65 Grading and Reporting Vision

D65's vision is that report card grades are **meaningful, accurate, and actionable** for students, their families and educators.

The Purpose of the Report Card

The purpose of a report card is to communicate a snapshot of current learning including information on academic achievement and learning habits.

Section 2: Why Standards Based Grading?

District 65 educators and families have identified a need to improve the D65 report card and grading practices to reflect the values in the vision and purpose. We heard from students, families and educators that grades did not truly reflect what students knew and could do. We heard that the skills were not always aligned to our current standards and grade expectations. We heard that information on behavior got mixed up with academic performance. Most importantly we heard that people want a system that is clearer and allows them to better understand if their student is demonstrating the learning required at each grade level

To do this, we are implementing standards based grading and reporting systems. This will ensure that grades truly reflect student achievements and areas of growth, are consistent across the district, and promote equitable grading practices.

We recognize that grades and report cards are an important form of feedback to both students and their families regarding their performance in school. It is important that they are accurate, meaningful, and actionable. For this to be realized, grades need to give a precise picture of what students have learned and what they need to work on for further learning.

The new standards based report cards and guidance were developed after an extensive review of research by experts in the field through books and articles, working with a core group of K-8 educators that formed the

Report Card Committee for the past 5 years and by collecting feedback from D65 administrators and teachers as well as parents and students.

Section 3: What is standards based grading?

Standards based grading is an approach to reporting learning that separates the academic performance (product of learning) from a student's learning habits (process of learning).

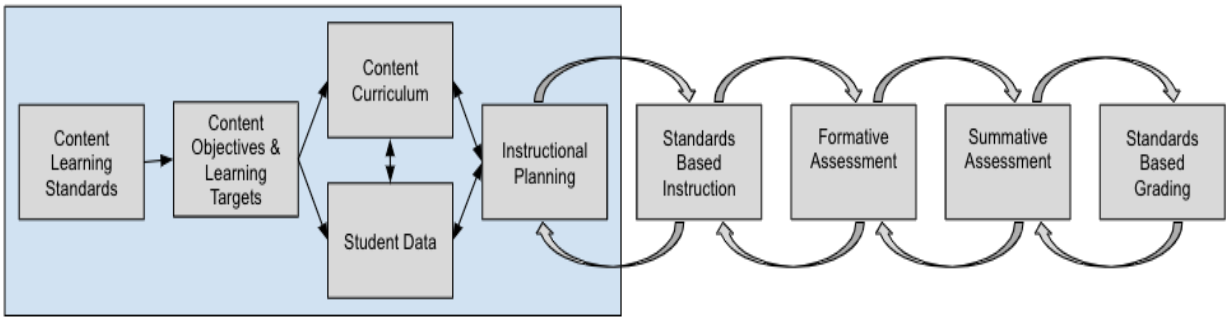
- Learning Habits: how a student goes about learning
- Academics: performance to grade level academic standards

Standards based grading is the end product of a standards based learning system. “The simple idea of standards-based learning is to ensure transparency in all elements of the teaching and learning process: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting. (Guskey, Ed Week, 10/14/2016)”

In a standards based system, the curriculum begins with understanding the standards and deciding on what the most important learning is for students to learn and be able to apply. Educators then take their knowledge of students and their craft and engage with the curriculum and the instructional materials to plan learning for students.

D65 Grading Pathway

D65 Pathway from Standards to Grading (Figure A)



A key difference in a standards-aligned system is that teachers and students have clear knowledge of the learning targets (what students must know and be able to do) that indicate if students are performing at grade level. Educators and students work together to measure progress, provide feedback and ultimately demonstrate learning. **Figure A** captures standards based learning and shows that students engage in assessment along the way (formative) to give them feedback on learning targets.

A second key difference in standards based grading is that it is important to separate feedback on learning habits and academic performance.

- ***Academic Measures*** reflect how well students have achieved specific academic learning goals, standards, or competencies.
- ***Learning Habits*** describe student behaviors that facilitate, broaden, or extend learning. These learning habits are organized into three categories - prepared to learn, engaging in learning and taking initiative to learn.

In summary, in a standards based system–

- ❖ Curriculum clearly identifies what needs to be learned and how to assess it.
- ❖ Learning targets are clear and shared with students.
- ❖ Formative assessments are used to monitor student understanding and growth towards learning targets.

- Students have opportunities to work on areas of need as indicated by the formative assessments.
- Students are assessed using summative assessments that are standards aligned after learning has occurred.
- Process of learning and product of learning are reported separately.

D65 Grading Principles

In a standards based system, grades are determined using a set of principles. The principles are intended to increase the transparency of grades and to move us closer to our vision of sharing grades with families that are meaningful, accurate and actionable.

#1 Grades are based on proficiency demonstrated on tasks aligned to standards and clear learning targets.

- Students know the goals they are working on.
- Students know the success criteria and expectations.
- Students know how they will be assessed and what evidence will be collected.

#2 Use of valid evidence for the product of learning measures or letter grades

- Valid Evidence
  - Summative assessments/work including unit assessments, benchmark assessments, portfolios, projects/presentations, etc. See below to learn more.
- Not-valid evidence
  - Homework, late work, extra credit, behavior (unless aligned to a learning habit)

#3 Grading is based on established clear criteria.

- Clear Criteria
  - Student and family know what is measured ahead of time, assessments are aligned to grade level goals, rubrics are clear and shared ahead of time,
- Not Clear criteria
  - Students and family learn what is measured after grading is completed, assessments are not well aligned with grade level goals, rubrics are not clear or not shared

#4 Students are given feedback as they learn, but only assessed after learning has occurred.

- Students receive feedback from teacher and peers as they are learning
- Teachers uses regular formative assessments and checkpoints to monitor learning and provide needed supports
- Assessments to inform grades occur after the content has been taught and practiced and students have received feedback on their learning.
- Graded assessments and tasks are aligned to grade level goals and completed independently by the student unless the standard says otherwise.

#5 Grades are based on levels of proficiency (4-point scale) and not an average of a 100-point scale.

- Grades are based on students' demonstrated levels of proficiency and learning progress made using several pieces of evidence.
- Students are able to move up on the 4-point scale when they show improvement over time and not brought down by low scores that would be averaged to determine their final grade in a 100-point system.
- The 4-point scale encourages students to do better and bring their grades up and not give up on learning with a 100-point scale.

Note: Students are encouraged to use feedback from their teachers to improve on their academic goals. The Habits of Learning are critical to making this improvement happen. It is critical that you

partner with your child's educator to encourage your child to develop good learning habits and take assigned class work and homework seriously.

#6 Report academic achievement (product) and learning habits (process) descriptors separately.

- Academic Learning Domains and Descriptors (examples):
  - Math - Number Systems - I can use visual fraction models to solve problems involving division of fractions
  - Social Studies - Inquiry - I can identify evidence from multiple sources to support my claims
- Learning Habits Descriptors (examples):
  - Prepared to Learn
  - Engages in Learning
  - Takes initiative to learn

Section 4: What will grades look like?

K-5 Learning measures/Grades:

Student Academic Learning Measures (Product)	
4	**Meeting Standard**: Meets and applies the rigor of the end-of-term standard consistently and independently across a variety of contexts.
3	**Approaching Standard**: Mostly meets the end-of-term standards consistently and independently across a variety of contexts.
2	**Partially Meeting**: Making progress towards consistently and independently meeting the end-of-term standards across a variety of contexts.
1	**Beginning Learning of the Standard:** Developing foundational skills needed to progress towards meeting the end-of-term standard consistently and independently.
0	**Not there yet/Missing:** Does not show evidence of learning yet.

6-8 Learning Measures/Grades:

Student Academic Learning Measures (Product)	
A(4)	**Meeting Standard**: Meets and applies the rigor of the end-of-term standard consistently and independently across a variety of contexts.
B(3)	**Approaching Standard**: Mostly meets the end-of-term standards consistently and independently across a variety of contexts.
C(2)	**Partially Meeting**: Making progress towards consistently and independently meeting the end-of-term standards across a variety of contexts.

D(1)	**Beginning Learning of the Standard:** Developing foundational skills needed to progress towards meeting the end-of-term standard consistently and independently.
F(0)	**Not there yet/Missing:** Does not show evidence of learning yet.

If the cell is gray without a learning measure, standards not addressed this trimester will be gray on the report card

If you wish to give us feedback on the updated report cards, please use this form.

K-5 Learning Habits (Process)
Learning Habits Reporting Descriptors
Asks and responds to questions related to specific topics
Uses feedback from others to make improvements.
Completes assignments with quality and punctuality
Takes risks as a learner.
Exhibits effort and perseverance
Takes initiative to learn
Accepts responsibility for their own behavior.
Demonstrates effective social problem solving skills.
Manages stress by using coping strategies.
Understands the effect of one's behaviors on others.
Identifies and communicates feelings and needs.
Respects others' identity, rights, and feelings.
Actively works to establish and maintain positive relationships
Works collaboratively with others.

Middle School Learning Habits (Process)

Prepares to Learn

Examples:

- I bring the materials I need for class (notebook, pencil, books, etc.).
- I come ready to focus and participate.
- I follow class routines that help me get started right away.
- I use my notes, and directions provided in class so I know what to do.
- I arrive with a positive attitude and an open mind.

Engages in Learning

Example:

- I stay focused on the task and avoid distractions.
- I listen to others and build on their ideas.
- I ask questions when I'm curious or need clarification.
- I participate by sharing my thoughts during discussions or activities.
- I make connections between what we're learning and my own experiences or the world around me.
- I try different strategies when I get stuck instead of giving up.
- I use feedback from peers and teachers to improve my work.
- I reflect on what I've learned and think about what I can do next

Takes Initiative to Learn

Examples:

- I ask questions when I'm curious or when I don't understand something.
- I look for resources (books, notes, technology, peers, teachers) to help me.
- I don't wait to be told what to do—I get started on my own.
- I check my progress and reflect on how I can improve.
- I notice when I need help and advocate for myself.

Makes strong effort to complete homework

Examples:

- I complete my homework on time and stay consistent with my work.
- I put care and attention into my homework so it shows my best effort.
- I take responsibility by coming prepared with my homework finished.
- I keep trying, even when the homework is challenging.
- I use homework to check what I've learned and find out what I still need to practice.
- I use my homework to ask questions and get help when I don't understand something

Learning Habits Measures K-8

Consistently	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**
The student consistently and independently demonstrates the expectation.	The student demonstrates this expectation with some consistency and independence. .	The student demonstrates this expectation with little consistency or independence.

Section 5: Grading Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 Plans

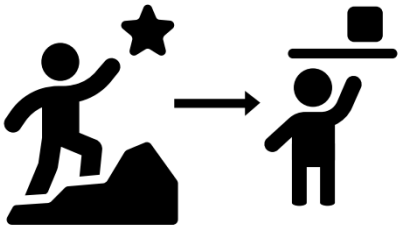
A student's report card communicates where a student is in their learning in relation to grade level expectations defined by the State of Illinois standards. This is the goal of the report card for all students who are enrolled in grade level courses regardless of an IEP or English Language Learner (EL) status.

Students receiving **accommodations and/or modifications per IEP or 504** will receive a report card based on a student's current achievement on grade level expectations reflecting the standards for the grade level in which students are placed.

K-8 Students

A(4)	Student meets grade level standard with or without an IEP
B(3)	Student mostly meets the end-of-term standards with or without an IEP
C(2)	Student is making progress toward grade level standard per the IEP
D(1)	Student is developing foundational skills needed to progress towards meeting the end-of-term standard with or without an IEP
F(0)	The student does not show evidence of learning yet.

A ***scaffold*** is a temporary support to help a student access lesson learning and achieve a specific learning goal.



A ***modification*** is a change to the actual lesson content or expected products that alters the grade-level learning goal.

- **Accommodation**: An accommodation is a *change that removes a barrier to learning or getting grade level work done*. Accommodations don't change what students learn in school. They change how students learn and how they get their work done. For example, students might get extra time to read through a word problem, but they don't get fewer problems or easier ones. Accommodations are listed in a child's IEP or language support plan.
    - Source: Accommodations: What are they and how they work (Understood)
- **Modification**: Modifications are *changes to what your child is taught* or *expected to do in school*. Modifications may alter the curriculum and are included in a child's IEP or language support plan.
    - Source: Modifications: What You Need to Know (Understood)

Students with an IEP or a Language Support plan will also receive a progress report during the report card window reporting on the students progress towards individualized goals.

Students will also receive a progress report that shares progress on a student's IEP goals.

Section 6: Grading English Language Learners

A student's report card communicates where a student is in their learning in relation to grade level expectations defined by the State of Illinois standards. This is the goal of the report card for all students who are enrolled in grade level courses regardless of an IEP or English Language Learner (EL) status.

Multilinguals in the Two Way Immersion (TWI)

Who are they? Spanish and English native speakers working on understanding, speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish and English.

TWI Program Goals -

- Developing into becoming bilingual and biliterate students
- Ensure high academic achievement for each student, in both Spanish and English
- Achieve socio cultural competence, which includes equity and social justice for all people and cultures

Grading TWI Students -

Students in the bilingual program are graded according to grade level standards in line with their peers on the grade level report card.

English Learners (EL)

Who are they? Students who are learning the English language in an English only classroom.

Program Goals -

- Develop both social and academic language in all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Develop English skills while learning grade appropriate academic content
- Develop academic English language proficiency to assist students in meeting glllinois Learning Standards and Illinois English Language Proficiency Standards
- Increase students' English proficiency to function without extra language support overtime
- Develop the social emotional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed for success in school and beyond

Grading EL Students

Students who are English Language Learners are graded according to grade level standards in line with their peers on the grade level report card.

Students will also receive a progress report that shares progress on a student's language goals. Language development is monitored and measured using the following scale.

Proficiency Level	Description of English Language Proficiency Levels
1 – Entering	Knows and uses minimal social English and minimal academic English with visual support
2 – Emerging	Knows and uses some social English and general academic English with visual support
3 – Developing	Knows and uses social English and some specific academic English with visual support
4 – Expanding	Knows and uses social English and some technical academic English
5 – Bridging	Knows and uses social and academic English working with grade level material
6 – Reaching	Knows and uses social and academic English at a level comparable to that of English proficient peers performing at the “proficient” level on state-wide assessments

Section 7: Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Academic Reporting Descriptors	Report Card Items related to academic outcomes.
Accommodation	Adaptations that provide access for any student to the general curriculum but do not fundamentally alter the grade-level standard or proficiency level.
Benchmark Assessment	Is given twice a year to measure student skills, knowledge, and understanding of grade-level standards that have been taught prior to that time in the school year or before.
Formative Assessment	Assessments used daily/weekly by educators to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback to students and determine the next steps for instructional planning.
IEP	An Individualized Education Plan (or Program) is also known as an IEP. This is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability who is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services.
Learning Habits	Help students and educators monitor *how* students develop habits that make them stronger learners, including: • Prepares to learn - organized and ready • Engages in learning - focused and active • Takes initiative for learning - reflective and proactive in using feedback
Learning Measure	**Learning Measure** ← the description of attainment (eg,

	Meeting, Progressing, Beginning) • Used for both Academic and Learning Habit Reporting Descriptors • Only Academic Reporting Descriptor use Extends
Learning Standard	The broadest, most general form of learning expectation from which more specific grade level curriculum is developed. Content standards describe what students should know and be able to do.
Learning Target	*I can* statements - Help students and educators identify *what* important concepts students will learn and what essential actions they will be able to do.
Modification	Adaptations to the curriculum that fundamentally alter the grade-level expectation, but do not fundamentally alter the content standard. Modifications are provided only to students who qualify for special education services or highly capable students. Modifications typically include reducing the cognitive load, methodology or delivery of instructions, and/or the performance criteria.
Learning Habits	Indicators of student behavior and work habits in school.
Standards-Based System	A system where the curriculum, instruction, and assessments are clearly aligned to the learning standards and designed to help students attain these standards.
Summative Assessment	A summative task/assessment is any standards aligned task with grade level rigor that is completed after the student has had access to teaching, practice, feedback and is done with independence unless the standard calls for collaboration
504 Plan	The 504 Plan is a plan developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment.

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