



Standards-Based Grading

Getting Started Guide

What is it?

Standards-based grading is a grading system that grades students using a set of standards or learning outcomes, as opposed to traditional grading, which is based on a percentage system.¹

Why use it?

The takeaway: More precisely measure and communicate student progress toward standards mastery -- thereby ensuring grades represent learning (versus other measures) and building student engagement in their own learning.

In traditional grading systems, grades are not always an objective, fair, and accurate representation of students' performance. In these systems, grades largely reflect students' behaviors (such as participation, turning in homework, and completing assignments) in addition to performance on assessments. This can lead to equity and achievement gaps for underprivileged students and students who learn at different rates.² Additionally, traditional grades measure student performance at a specific point in time, without conveying what concepts the student did or did not master - and without clarity on when the student might be able to return to concepts not yet mastered.

Standards-based grading can help balance these concerns. Aligning grading with course standards incentivizes students to improve their grades by pursuing mastery of concepts, rather than extra credit, test scores, and behavior-based measures. Standards-based grading can require significant changes to stakeholder mindsets (including students' families), processes, and resourcing. However, when implemented carefully, standards-based grading can help schools center that which is most important - student learning.

How is it successfully implemented?

- Establish coherent norms for academic competencies and what grades mean
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate their understanding of standards
- Include teachers in planning efforts and provide ongoing professional learning related to new standards.
- Ensure parents understand the “why” and “how” of any new grading system.
- Center equity by removing biased, competitive, and punitive practices (e.g., points for participation) and favoring supportive, environment-/ behavior-agnostic practices (e.g., test/project retakes)
- Invite students to co-create their “bar” for mastery (e.g., choice in which mastery level they want to achieve).

¹ Aurora Institute. (2020, February 27). What is the Difference between Standards-Based Grading (or Reporting) and Competency-Based Education? https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/what-is-the-difference-between-standards-based-grading/

² Grading for Equity, & Feldman, J. (2018, October). School Grading Policies are Failing Children: A Call to Action for Equitable Grading. <https://crescendoedgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Call-to-Action-for-Equitable-Grading-Oct-2018.pdf>

- [Use tech to support implementation](#) of standards-based grading

What are examples of it done well?

- [Common Mastery-Based Practices](#)
- [Student Self-Reporting Progress](#)

Who can we learn from?

- Bronx Arena High School: [Creating a Culture of Revision: Emphasizing the ability to improve upon work based on feedback and student revisions](#)
- Casco Bay High School: [Family Handbook](#) | [Habits of Work \(HOW\) rubric](#) | [Faculty Grading Guide](#)
- CICS West Belden: [Standards Based Reporting](#)
- DesMoines Public Schools: [Grading Page](#)
- Pinellas County Schools: [How Restorative Grading Practices are taking Credit Recovery to the Next Level](#)
- Pleasant View Elementary: [Standards-Based Report Cards](#) | [Teacher Supported Student Goal Setting](#)
- Virginia Student-Led Assessment Networked Improvement Community: [Student-Developed Learning Goals tied to Learning Standards/Targets](#)