



A Parent's Guide to Understanding Standards-Based Learning

As we transform our schools to meet the needs of the future, it is critical we examine the ways we prepare and engage students. Assessments and grades are two ways we provide feedback on student performance. We believe grades should reflect the proficiency of a student in relation to a specific standard.

“Standards-based learning” is a method of providing feedback that is purely academic in nature and a more accurate reflection of what the student actually knows and can do.

Our goal is for our student grades to be consistent, accurate, meaningful, and supportive of their learning. When teachers use a traditional grading system, a student's grade may be the culmination of assessments, homework, effort, and behavior. Standards-based learning is being implemented in an effort to reach our goal of providing consistent, accurate, and meaningful feedback that supports student learning.

Standards-based learning addresses the four criteria required of a uniform reporting system:

- **Accuracy:** Basing a student's grade on assessments of learning allows the teacher to create a clear picture of what the student has learned without the influence of other, non-academic factors. These other factors, such as effort and behavior, are still essential, but are not part of the student's academic grade and are communicated separately in a citizenship report.
- **Consistency:** For each outcome, the teacher provides a learning scale, or rubric that describes exactly what the student should know or be able to do. The rubrics identify criterion for proficiency and are used consistently throughout the unit and semester.
- **Meaningful:** A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates the learning that has taken place. In a standards-referenced classroom, scores are recorded by the learning outcomes rather than by categories, such as tests or homework. This makes it easier to identify areas of strength and areas of growth.
- **Supportive of Learning:** Standards-based learning supports student's knowledge by focusing on demonstrated proficiency and providing enrichment and intervention as needed. The reassessment policy supports student learning by allowing new levels of learning to replace old when a student demonstrates improvement on an assessment.

The following are answers for parents with the rationale to why we are transitioning to standards-based learning at HighMark Charter.

Q: What is standards-based learning?

Standards-based learning focuses a student's learning on the essential outcomes for a class, or how well the student understands and can apply the key material in class. This approach focuses on student growth and continual feedback based on the following four-point scale. *

4	The student has gone above and beyond grade level expectations and has applied extended thinking and application of the standard in a variety of situations.
3	The student has completely mastered the Utah State Core Standard.
2	The student has many of the prerequisite skills but has not yet achieved mastery on the Utah State Core Standard.
1	The student requires assistance.

*This scale is a classroom-based mastery scale and NOT the same scale that is used to determine GPA in 9th grade only..

Q: Why are we moving to a system of reporting that focuses on standards?

We want to improve student achievement for all students in every classroom. This change to a standards-based learning system comes from the belief that our current report card does not fully communicate what students are expected to know and be able to do as set forth in the Utah State Core Standards. This reporting system will benefit students, teachers, and families. It will allow students to be more aware of what is expected of them. It will provide families with a more detailed outline of the expectations in each of the major academic areas. We believe your understanding of what is expected of your student and how well he/she is progressing towards the goals at his /her grade level is very important. Standards-based learning will assist in this endeavor. Although non-academic skills are critical to college, career, and life readiness, they will be reported in a citizenship manner and not mixed with academics.

Q: How is standards-based learning different?

Compared to traditional grading, standards-based learning more accurately represents learning progress towards the proficiency of standards. Assessing progress allows feedback that is specific. This type of reporting also separates behavior and process standards from content standards.

Q: Why aren't grades based on percentages?

Simply put, a percentage does not represent an accurate picture of where a student is in his/her learning. A student who struggles in their learning at the beginning of the term but keeps working at it and demonstrates solid understanding by the end of the grading period should receive a grade that shows he/she have mastered the standard.

Q: Is a 4 similar to an A?

No. It might make sense to convert the levels of proficiency to the traditional grading system but we avoid doing this because we are no longer averaging learning. In standards-based learning, we describe what a student has learned and to what level.

- 1 indicates a student still needs help,
- 2 indicates the student is moving closer to mastery but is still working on it,
- 3 means the student has met the standard and is right where we expect them to be,
- 4 indicates a student not only has met the standard but is able to take the skills and concepts and transfer them to new learning.

Q: How will I know if my student is on track throughout the year?

Just like in previous years, the classroom teacher will use assignments, assessments, and observations to determine how your student is doing. In the past you may have asked, “How is my student doing in Math?” This question still applies; however, your student’s teacher will now be able to provide detail about the standards that are included within math which will provide you more useful information.

Q: Why is it that my student can get all the answers correct on an assignment but not get a 4?

Assignments are leveled to provide students with opportunities to practice what they need as well as demonstrate their understanding throughout the learning process. Some assignments may not have level 4 work included until the end of the standard for a variety of reasons.

Students who are just beginning their learning and still on their way to mastery of the standard simply won’t be ready to transfer their learning to a more complex task. Once they show they can accurately and consistently complete tasks at level 2 (approaching) and level 3 (secure) then they may be ready to move on to level 4. Keep in mind, level 4 requires an ability to independently demonstrate level 3 tasks and readiness to take it to another level with little or no instruction.

Q: Will homework count in standards-based learning?

Homework used for practice is extremely important in the process of learning. In fact, practice typically makes a significant difference in the learning process. In this manner, homework counts very much. However, that being said, there is much more value placed on how students do in class on assignments, assessments, and other work. Homework completion will be reflected in the scores given on behavior/citizenship scales. The scores on content standards will not reflect activities such as homework, but instead reflect the achievement on assessments, projects, final papers, or other demonstrations of learning. Letter grades at the 9th grade level will reflect the mastery of the content standards.

Q: When will standards-based learning be fully implemented?

It requires a systematic process to transform the way we provide feedback to our students. We as a faculty are working diligently to have this in place with full implementation for the 2021-22 school year.

Additional References

- Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading by Patricia L. Scriffiny
http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/Seven_Reasons_for_Standards-Based_Grading.aspx

- Grading to Communicate by Tony Winger
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov05/vol63/num03/Grading-to-Communicate.aspx>