

## **What is standards based grading all about?**

In education, **Standards** are specific statements about what students should know and be able to do at every grade level, in every subject. In Ohio, we are expected to teach the Ohio Learning Standards. These can be found on the Ohio Department of Education's website. Locally we have the ability to choose how, when and with what materials we teach the standards. To be successful, students are expected to master all the standards at each grade level.

## **What is meant by a *standards based* system?**

In a standards based system; instruction, assessment and reporting a student's progress, are all linked specifically to the learning standards. Students are expected to demonstrate understanding or *mastery* of the knowledge or skills embedded in each standard. Not only are there standards for the core content areas such as reading and math, but also for areas such as technology, social and emotional growth and career and college readiness! Because there are many standards at each grade level, not all standards are deemed equally as important as others. Those that are critical for success at the next grade level are referred to as 'high priority' standards. As a parent, at a minimum you will receive feedback on your child's progress on mastering the high priority standards. A Standards Based report card is designed to communicate specifically on how your child is progressing toward mastery of the grade level standards.

## **Is standards based grading better?**

There are several reasons why educators believe a standards based system is better. On a traditional grade card, one might see that the student is getting a C in math. While you know that means your child's average of all the grades for the quarter fell between a 70 - 79%, it does not tell you what your child could do well or what he/she needs to improve upon.

On a standards based report card, using a numerical performance level, you will see specific information such as

- Solves problems using multiplication -3
- Solves problems using money or time - 1
- Measure liquid volumes and mass of objects - 2
- Able to determine area and perimeter of shapes - 4

Using the 4 point performance level scale - I can quickly see that my child is really strong in the area of geometry- working with area and perimeter. However we have some work to do with time and money concepts.

Using a traditional letter grade system, grades are averaged. If a student fails to turn in an assignment and receives a '0', or struggles with one particular skill or concept, that will negatively impact the average and result in a low or failing grade. The inability to overcome a low mark can be very discouraging!

In a standards based system, a mastery rubric or performance scale is used. This rubric clearly communicates what is expected or demonstrated at each performance level. In addition, students and parents can clearly see what has been demonstrated and what still needs to be demonstrated in order to move to the next level on the rubric. Assignment scores are not averaged, rather, as one moves across the continuum, the mark on the report card will reflect the highest mark/level demonstrated. Let's use the analogy of running a 5K race. If distance running is new to me, the first time I run a 5K, my time is likely to be rather high. If I have 10 weeks (a quarter) to train, by the end of the 10 weeks when I run the actual race, it would be natural that my time would be significantly better. What time should be used as my result? The actual time demonstrated on race day? Or an average of all my times, including my first attempt? In a standards based system, there is a clear goal/learning target, and with practice and coaching(instruction) students will know what they need to do to achieve the goal and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate or work toward success.

### **Why do we use performance levels for the standards instead of letter grades?**

The learning progressions of children are too complex to be reduced to a simple letter grade. Our standards based reporting system is designed to provide specific and timely information about how your child is doing as he/she moves toward or beyond mastery of the grade level standards.

The performance levels we use to report student progress are: 1, 2, 3, or 4.

1. **Limited:** The student has *limited skills*, and support is needed to do grade level work.
2. **Approaching:** The student is *approaching grade level expectations*. He/she can demonstrate *some* of the skills or shows partial mastery of the standard.
3. **Goal:** The student is *meeting grade level expectations!* The student can consistently demonstrate mastery of all aspects of the grade level standard.
4. **Exceeds grade level expectations.** The student demonstrates learning that goes above and beyond grade level expectations.

### **Why are there blank spaces on the report card?**

There are many standards to be taught at each grade level. Many are taught in a specific sequential order or logical progression, while others are simply spaced apart to allow ample time for students to learn and practice. A standard is not reported until after it has been taught, practiced and the student assessed for mastery. A blank space simply means that standard has not been taught yet.

## **What are grade level mastery scales?**

A mastery scale is a rubric which outlines the criteria or provides descriptors for each level of performance. On the scales we developed there are four columns, **the actual grade level standard can be located in column 3. To meet grade level expectations, the student needs to be able to demonstrate that he/she understands or can do everything described in column 3.** The rubric progresses from left to right. Column 1 indicates the student has limited skills and needs support to do grade level work. Column 2 breaks down the standard into partial skills or stepping stones. This is where the student, teacher and parent will be able to determine or track what has been accomplished so far and what still needs to be accomplished. When a student demonstrates all parts of the standard, the standard is mastered and the student earns a 3! Some students may have skills that exceed grade level expectations or may be motivated to strive to work beyond what is expected. Column 4 will outline skills, projects, problem solving or work that demonstrate work that is above and beyond grade level expectations. (See sample of Riding a Bike mastery scale)

## **Why is standards based grade important? And why now?**

Transitioning to a standards based system takes time and involves a great amount of work prior to implementation. The PCS staff has been working toward this for several years. We began with dissecting the new standards that have been adopted in the past three years and analyzing the core content area standards to understand the depth and complexity within them. Work has been done to prioritize the standards, review and develop pacing guides, align our teaching resources, create mastery scales/rubrics and develop assessments to match. While a significant amount of work has been accomplished we still have more work to do! In fact, an important part of this process is continual evaluation of how we are teaching and assessing our students. As we make these systemic changes or shifts in thinking and practice we anticipate some bumps along the road. However, we are committed to making these changes because our students deserve it, and we owe it to them to give them the best opportunities possible to grow, learn and be successful! Our parents also deserve the best communication possible from us- to understand in detail how their child is performing in school and how they are progressing toward mastering grade level standards.