

Standards Based Grading System

This year, we will be transitioning to a Standards Based Grading (SBG) System in all Social Studies classes, which might cause some confusion when looking at your child's grades on Parent Connect. ALL assignments will be given a score of 0-4, which aligns more closely with a traditional 4 point grading scale used to calculate grade point averages. The scale will be using is as follows:

Mastery		Proficient		Partial Proficient		Below Basic Understanding		Shows no Evidence of Understanding	
A	4 - 3.3	B	3	C	2.9 - 2.5	D	2.4 - 1.85	E	1.84 - 0

The focus of SBG is to assess students on whether or not they have mastered a skill. This is a change from the way students have been assessed in the past, which was based on being able to remember dates, events, and characters. An important aspect of SBG is that students will be given more than one opportunity to show that they have mastered a concept. On a typical assessment, students will have 4 attempts to show mastery. The grade for the first attempt will be entered into the gradebook, but then changed if the student's score improves on a future attempt. Multiple attempts will NOT be averaged together and the highest score will be the one that remains in the gradebook.

SBG is not just a change in the way we assign grades, it is a shift in the way we educate and assess our students. Out of the significant amount of research on SGB available, I have compiled a helpful guide for parents.

Compared to traditional evaluation, standards-based grading:

1. **Gives meaning to grades** — With standards-based grading, students are compared to a standard that all can reach. This prevents evaluations from being artificially ranked into a bell curve where some students must be called failures, and only a few are allowed to succeed. Letter or number grades are based on **achieving or surpassing the expectations of the course's standards**.
2. **Prevents assessment of the wrong things** — Students are often evaluated based on criteria that have nothing to do with skills or knowledge such as work ethic or participation. Students are punished or rewarded by well-meaning teachers who wish to prepare them for the "real world." The challenge is how drastically inconsistent grading becomes and how little final marks reflect student learning. With standards-based grading, homework and in-class participation are used as methods for practicing skills, rather than as assessments themselves. Students are told which standards they will be practicing when participating or completing homework.
3. **Help teachers adjust instruction** — It is easier to see exactly where students are struggling with standards-based grading. This allows teachers to modify future lesson plans and further reinforce standards where students are underperforming. This also provides more opportunities for personalized education as each student can focus on the standards that they have not yet met or pursue enrichment when desired.
4. **Demonstrate Clear Success Criteria** — Students are given examples of work that demonstrates proficiency in the standards. This gives students a model to look to when completing their work and even allows them to self-assess their work. This can help to prevent behavior such as copying homework or monopolizing a classroom discussion to receive participation marks.

Standards-based grading provides an effective method for teachers to assess the standards that federal and state governments have worked hard to create. It provides an easy benchmark to judge whether or not students are ready for the challenges that they will face in the job market or higher education. Standards-based grading may be the path to truly personalized education, giving teachers the power to help every student achieve their full potential.

Benefits of using a SBG grading system

Benefit 1: Grades need to measure the mastery of content, not work habits. Standards-Based grades do just that, measure proficiency.

Sometimes, students who can easily master the standards end up getting lower grades if they do not complete homework and other assignments, or if their behavior is less than desirable. On the other hand, students who have good work habits but may not have mastered all of the standards in a course, end up getting better grades. In Patricia Scriffiny's article in *Educational Leadership: Expecting Excellence*, she states, "The crucial idea is to use a system that is not based on the inappropriate use of averages. The system must not allow students to mask their level of understanding with their attendance, their level of effort, or other peripheral issues." In this sense, letter grades do not always measure students' knowledge of the content, but whether or not they have good work habits. Standards-Based grading is a fair way to show mastery of a subject. Some people might be thinking, well shouldn't hard work be rewarded? I agree. I do think good work habits are important to teach and instill in students, but they still don't measure what the student knows. Work habits should be measured and included in a grade report but should be kept separate from the learning objectives.

Benefit 2: Standards-based grades are more informative for students, teachers, and parents

In our traditional A,B,C,D,F grading system, when a student earns an 83 on an assessment, it is considered a B. But, what does that B mean? It doesn't tell us which standards the student has mastered, and which still need work. Moving from letter grades to standards-based grades will let students, parents, and teachers better identify a student's true level of mastery. In addition, knowing which standards students are struggling with helps teachers to more accurately match students where their needs are. According to Scriffiny, the standards-based grade book gives a wealth of information to help the teacher adjust instruction. Instead of looking at an arbitrary list of percentages, you can easily identify students who may need to be retaught a concept in order to achieve mastery. Similarly, for students who are quick to master the standards in a given course, they would move to the next standard on the continuum at their own pace, so that their learning would be more individualized, which leads to the next benefit...

Benefit 3: It encourages a growth mindset

Standards-Based grading is essential in schools with a growth mindset. The idea is that students can work towards mastery on each of the standards until they are proficient. They would have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their proficiency for a standard and will move forward once they are ready to do so. It lends itself to individualized learning, where students work on mastering the standards they need to.

Figure 1. Comparing Traditional and Standards-Based Grade Books

Traditional Grade Book				Standards-Based Grade Book			
Name	Homework Average	Quiz 1	Chapter 1 Test	Name	Objective 1: Write an alternate ending for a story	Objective 2: Identify the elements of a story	Objective 3: Compare and contrast two stories
John	90	65	70	John	Partially proficient	Proficient	Partially proficient
Bill	50	75	78	Bill	Proficient	Proficient	Partially proficient
Susan	110	50	62	Susan	Partially proficient	Partially proficient	Partially proficient
Felicia	10	90	85	Felicia	Advanced	Proficient	Proficient
Amanda	95	100	90	Amanda	Partially proficient	Advanced	Proficient

