

Solon Community School District
Grading Purpose and Guidelines
Approved by the Board of Education in June 2012

PURPOSE:

The primary purpose of grading in the Solon Community School District is to communicate achievement status to students, parents and others.

Secondary purposes of grading include:

- providing feedback to students for self-assessment and growth
- encouraging student progress and self-monitoring of learning

GUIDELINES:

1. Entries in the grade book that count towards the final grade will be limited to course or grade level standards.**
2. Extra credit will not be given at any time.
3. Students will be allowed multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of classroom standards in various ways. Retakes and revisions will be allowed.
4. Teachers will determine grade book entries by considering multiple points of data emphasizing the most recent data and provide evidence to support their determination.
5. Students will be provided multiple opportunities to practice standards independently through homework or other class work. Practice assignments and activities will be consistent with classroom standards for the purpose of providing feedback. Practice assignments, including homework, will not be included as part of the final grade.

***Exceptions will be made for midterm and/or final summative assessments. These assessments, limited to no more than one per nine-week period may be reported as a whole in the grade book.*

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Implementation timeline:

Spring 2012 staff survey data indicated additional time and support were necessary before full implementation, therefore a two-year tiered implementation will take place. Solon teachers who are already implementing the grading guidelines as well as educators from neighboring school districts would lead building professional learning times (i.e. before school starts and afternoon of full in-service days) and half-day implementation summits to assist our teachers who need additional time and support.

2012-13

- Professional learning at the middle school and high school focuses on implementing the grading guidelines.
- Middle school and high school teachers implement the grading guidelines with at least one of their classes by the beginning of the 4th quarter.

2013-14

- Middle school and high school teachers implement the grading guidelines in all classes at the beginning of the school year.

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Each of the grading guidelines is explained in more detail below. [Intended audience: Solon teachers]

1. Entries in the grade book that count towards the final grade will be limited to course or grade level standards.

Grading Guideline:

“Entries in the grade book that count towards the final grade will be limited to course or grade level standards.”

Summary:

What it means....

- When creating a new entry in the grade book that counts towards the final grade, it must be a standard such as “Find the area of a regular polygon by applying trigonometric ratios” or “Understands how evolution occurs (natural selection, mutation, migration, and genetic drift).”
- Assignments or other activities that do not count towards the final grade may still be recorded in the grade book for the purpose of communicating with students and parents, however it should be clearly noted as such.

What it doesn't mean...

- Course or grade level standards must be word-for-word from the Iowa/Common Core essentials concepts and skills list.
- Entering “Mitosis Project” or “Unit 5 Test” in the grade book.
- Student practice does not need to be recorded.

Briefs from the literature:

“When grades are not deliberately connected to learning, they provide little valuable feedback regarding students’ academic strengths and weaknesses, and can even be counterproductive.” (Winger, 2005, p. 62)

“Teachers should use learning goals as the basis for determining grades...They provide a profile of a student’s knowledge and direct evidence of his or her strengths and weaknesses. This type of assessment allows teachers to appropriately plan instruction, and allows students to focus their learning” (O’Connor, 2007, p. 231)

Putting it into practice:

What works?	What are the common pitfalls to avoid?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-writing Iowa/Common Core essential concepts and skills in language that students and parents can understand.• Recording practice/homework assignments in the gradebook through using the “collected” tracking feature.• Communicating the standards to students in written form at the beginning of the semester, chapter and/or unit and asking them to track their progress in a way that parallels the electronic grade book.• Consider combining several state standards into one standard that makes sense to students and parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing standards in the gradebook that parents and students do not understand.• Not communicating completion of practice activities with parents and students on a regular basis.• Failing to communicate the shift from assessments to standards in the grade book with students and parents.• Writing too many standards or writing standards that are difficult to assess.• Utilizing a “responsibility” standard.

2. Extra credit will not be given at anytime.

Grading Guideline:

“Extra credit will not be given at anytime.”

Summary:

What it means....

- Individual students will not be given extra assignments to be completed that will artificially improve their final grade.
- Students will not be awarded points towards the final grade that are based on providing classroom supplies.
- Grades should improve when students learn at higher levels rather than when they complete additional work or turn in work before a deadline.

What it doesn't mean...

- No longer providing students with extra practice or extension opportunities.

Briefs from the literature:

“Sadly, this emphasis on earning points in order to procure the grade commodity diminishes the value of learning” (Guskey and Bailey, 2001, p. 20)

“A low grade simply communicates a learning gap; the way to raise the grade is to learn more” (Winger, 2005, p. 64)

Putting it into practice:

What works?	What are the common pitfalls to avoid?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asking students who want to raise their grade which standards they have not yet demonstrated understanding and then focusing on these standards.• Eliminating all extra credit opportunities.• Encouraging students who already understand a standard to teach it to their peers.• Using Bloom’s (revised) Taxonomy or Webb’s Depth of Knowledge framework to audit assessments for academic rigor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Framing excessive reassessment opportunities as being synonymous with the extra credit. Students may continue to reassess until they get an “easy question.”

3. Students will be allowed multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of classroom standards in various ways.

Grading Guideline:

“Students will be allowed multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of classroom standards in various ways. Retakes and revisions will be allowed.”

Summary:

What it means...

- Students learn at different subjects at varying rates, therefore students who did not demonstrate understanding by [insert date] should be allowed to demonstrate understanding at a later date.
- Teachers should provide individual students additional opportunities to demonstrate understanding after the final regularly scheduled whole group assessment for that particular standard. This can take place during class, study hall, seminar and/or outside of regular school hours.
- Teachers should consider utilizing multiple ways of assessing the same standard for different students.
- Students complete additional assessments targeting specific standards they currently do not understand at a high level.

What it doesn’t mean...

- Students should be encouraged to reassess without first completing additional learning opportunities individually or with the teacher, peer or parent.
- Reassessments must be optional.
- Grading periods are eliminated or students’ quarter/semester grades need to be changed after the end of the grading period.
- Students must complete the entire assessment again if they have already demonstrated a high level of understanding of a standard on a previous assessment.

Briefs from the literature:

“Classroom assessments and grading should focus on how well – not on when – the student mastered the designated knowledge and skill” (McTighe & O’Connor, 2005)

“The goal is that *all* students learn the content, not just the ones who can learn on the uniform timeline. Curriculum goals don’t require that every individual reaches the same level of proficiency on the same day, only that every student achieves the goal.” (Wormeli, 2011)

“The teacher who claims to be preparing students for the working world by disallowing all redos forgets that adult professionals actually flourish through redos, retakes, and doovers. Surgeons practice on cadavers

before doing surgeries on live patients. Architects redesign building plans until they meet all the specifications listed. Pilots rehearse landings and take-offs hundreds of times in simulators and in solo flights before flying with real passengers. Lawyers practice debate and analysis of arguments before litigating real cases. Teachers become much more competent and effective by teaching the same content multiple times, reflecting on what worked and what didn't work each time...The best preparation for the world beyond school is to learn essential content and skills well." (Wormeli, 2011)

Re-assessment should only take place after a relearning plan has been completed (Bramante & Colby, 2012)

Putting it into practice:

What works?	What are the common pitfalls to avoid?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring students to submit a relearning plan and to provide evidence the relearning took place before work can be redone for a standard the student has not previously demonstrated a high understanding. This relearning could include completing additional practice problems, a tutoring session, re-reading lab procedures, etc. • Spiraling: Re-teach groups of students and then modify future assessments. For example, include several questions about unit 1 standards on the unit 3 test. • Differentiating the product: Allowing some students to demonstrate understanding of the causes of the civil war by writing a paper while others create a movie. • Keeping a log of the number of times a student has completed optional reassessments for the purpose of communicating with parents. • Modeling: Requiring all students who did not demonstrate understanding on the first "final regularly scheduled whole group assessment for that particular standard" to complete another assessment for the purpose of demonstrating this change in your classroom early in the quarter/semester/year. • Communicating with parents and students when outside of class reassessment and additional learning opportunities will take place and asking students to sign-up ahead of time, i.e. "I will be available every Tuesday before school and Thursday after school." • Communicating with parents and students the final relearning deadline, i.e. one week before the end of the grading period. • Considering multiple points of data emphasizing the most recent data and providing evidence to support this determination when entering in the grade book. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing students to reassess without first requiring they have demonstrated new understanding. • Requiring students to complete all additional assessments outside of class. • Not communicating reassessment opportunities and practices with parents and students. • An "open door" reassessment policy that is not manageable over a long period of time. • Averaging reassessment scores when entering them in the grade book.

4. Teachers will determine grade book entries by considering multiple data points emphasizing the most recent data and provide evidence to support that determination.

Grading Guideline:

"Teachers will determine grade book entries by considering multiple points of data emphasizing the most recent data and provide evidence to support their determination."

Summary:

What it means...

- If a student demonstrates a low understanding of a standard on a Monday assessment, but demonstrates a higher understanding two weeks later, the mark in the grade book for that standard should improve.
- Scenario: Student A performs poorly on practice assignments and quizzes, but demonstrates the highest level of understanding on the test/project. Student B performs well on practices assignments

and quizzes and demonstrates the highest level of understanding on the test/project. Student A and student B should have similar entries in the grade book for the standard(s) assessed.

- Teachers are able to provide evidence (one or more examples of student work) to support an entry in the grade book.

What it doesn't mean...

- Homework, quizzes and/or test scores are simply averaged to calculate the grade book entry for a given standard.
- The most recent data **must** be used when determining the grade book entry.
- Averaging follow-up assessment opportunities with previous assessments to determine the grade book entry.

Briefs from the literature:

[In progress]

Putting it into practice:

What works?	What are the common pitfalls to avoid?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing students with feedback, based on their understanding of each standard, on each formal assessment • Recording student learning using a pre-determined rubric, i.e. 4, 5, 10-point scale, to build consistency from assessment to assessment and standard to standard. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a scale that does not easily relate back to letter grades.

5. Students will be provided multiple opportunities to practice standards independently through homework or other class work. Practice assignments and activities will be consistent with classroom standards for the purpose of providing feedback. Practice assignments, including homework, will not be included as part of the final grade.

Grading Guideline:

“Students will be provided multiple opportunities to practice standards independently through homework or other class work. Practice assignments and activities will be consistent with classroom standards for the purpose of providing feedback. Practice assignments, including homework, will not be included as part of the final grade.”

Summary:

What it means...

- Homework or practice assignments should be purposefully utilized to enhance students' understanding of classroom standards.
- Assignments which are designed for students to demonstrate their understanding at an early part of the learning cycle should not be counted towards the final grade.
- Opportunities (i.e. quiz, project or test) later on in the learning cycle that follow feedback on practice assignments should be considered for the grade book.

What it doesn't mean...

- Homework or practice assignments are no longer assigned or students are no longer asked to complete homework.
- Students are not provided feedback on homework or practice assignments.
- Work completed outside of class (i.e. project, paper) cannot be entered into the gradebook by standard.

Briefs from the literature:

“The belief that the carrot of a grade entices students to complete work is an illusion, one with roots in behaviorism and a negative view of learners (Vatterott, 2009). At its core, it negates students' intrinsic drive for

mastery (Cushman, 2010; Pink, 2009) and implies that homework is inherently distasteful. As Daniel Pink (2009), puts it, "We're bribing students into compliance instead of challenging them into engagement" (p. 174). In addition, grades only motivate students who are motivated by grades—and some students couldn't care less" (Vatterott, 2011)

"...past experience has taught us that we are often too quick to assign homework before students have had an opportunity to learn the skills and strategies needed to successfully complete it" (Fishey and Frey, 2008)

"When homework is used as a formative assessment, students have multiple opportunities to practice, get feedback from the teacher, and improve. Homework becomes a safe place to try out new skills without penalty, just as athletes and musicians try out their skills on the practice field or in rehearsals. Effective homework is the rehearsal before the final event" (Christopher, 2008).

Putting it into practice:

What works?	What are the common pitfalls to avoid?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing students with multiple opportunities to receive feedback before a standard is entered into the gradebook, i.e. student receives feedback on a draft of a paper before the final draft is entered into the gradebook by standard. • Assigning homework less frequently and/or a decrease in quantity in order to communicate with students the purpose of the practice assignment. • Asking students to provide each other feedback on practice assignments, i.e. sharing anonymous student work with the whole class and asking individuals and/or small groups to provide feedback. • Using homework formatively in nature. More specifically, assigning homework connected with standards for the purpose of planning future instruction. • Requiring students to complete practice assignments before they can reassess (insurance policy mindset). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Entering students' first attempt from daily work into the gradebook and then overwriting it as the student improves.</i> This may create a "Kindergarten" effect in which many students earn low grades at an early phase in the learning cycle. • <i>Not recording homework completion.</i> One way to overcome this pitfall is to use the "collected" and "missing" indicators in PowerSchool to communicate with students and parents the number of assignments that have been completed.

Suggested reading:

- Cushman, K. (2010, September). [Show us what homework's for](#). *Educational leadership*, 68(1), 74-78.
- Vatterott, C. (2011, November). Making homework central to learning. *Educational leadership*, 69(3), 60-64.