

**Solon Community Schools**  
**Standards-Based Grading – Frequently Asked Questions**

Last Updated September 18, 2012

**Why is the Solon school district making this change?**

- *Improved communication and additional feedback for parents, students and teachers* - parents and students will see areas of academic strength and weaknesses in the grade book rather than seeing a test score or homework assignment and wondering what the next steps might be. Teachers will know which standards they need to re-teach. Students will know which standards they need additional learning opportunities and/or practice.
- *Supports “assessment for learning,” one of the five characteristics of effective instruction from the Iowa Department of Education’s “Iowa Core” initiative* - In a traditional grading system, student assessments were often given for the purpose of entering them in the grade book. Assessment for learning means assessments are given for the purpose of identifying future learning opportunities/activities for students.

**What is the difference between traditional grading practices and standards-based grading?**

Traditional Grading System	Standards-Based Grading System
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on assessment methods (quizzes, tests, homework, projects, etc.). One grade/entry is given per assessment.</li> <li>2. Assessments are based on a percentage system. Criteria for success may be unclear.</li> <li>3. Use an uncertain mix of assessment, achievement, effort and behavior to determine the final grade. May use late penalties and extra credit.</li> <li>4. Everything goes in the grade book - regardless of purpose.</li> <li>5. Include every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average - not the best - work.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on learning goals and performance standards. One grade/entry is given per learning goal.</li> <li>2. Standards are criterion or proficiency-based. Criteria and targets are made available to students ahead of time.</li> <li>3. Measures achievement only OR separates achievement from effort/behavior. No penalties or extra credit given.</li> <li>4. Selected assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.) are used for grading purposes.</li> <li>5. Emphasize the most recent evidence of learning when grading.</li> </ol>

Adapted from O'Connor K (2002). *How to Grade for Learning: Linking grades to standards (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**What is the timeline for implementing the new standards-based grading guidelines? Why are some teachers implementing this differently right now (or some teachers not at all)?**

When the board of education approved the standards-based grading guidelines in Spring 2012, staff survey data indicated additional time was needed before full implementation. Many teachers are already implementing the grading guidelines in all of their classes. Still other teachers will learn more about implementing the grading guidelines through professional learning during the first three quarters of 2012-13. Middle school and high school teachers are required to implement the grading guidelines with at least one of their classes by the beginning of the 4th quarter. Teachers' implementation of the grading guidelines may vary during this time of professional learning until the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year when all classes are required to utilize the grading guidelines.

**When looking at the grade book, how can I help my students?**

When a student's score in the grade book are below proficiency, consider asking your student the following questions:

- What standards do you think you still need to learn?
- When was the last time you practiced / worked on [standard]?
- When was the last time you were assessed (i.e. test, quiz, project) on [standard]?
- When is your next opportunity to reassess on [standard]?
- What practice, studying and/or re-teaching opportunities have you completed in preparation for the next reassessment opportunity?

When contacting a teacher about below proficiency standards in the grade book, consider asking the following questions:

- When was the last time all students were assessed on [standard]?

- When is the next opportunity my student will have to reassess on [standard]?
- What practice, studying and/or re-teaching opportunities should my student take advantage of related to [standard] before reassessing?

### How might standards-based grading impact my student's grade point average (GPA)?

We do not anticipate seeing any long-term changes in GPA or honor cords, however we do believe quarter and semester grades in a standards-based system will be a better reflection of student learning.

- In a standards-based grading system, homework no longer counts towards the final grade, however it is still assigned and important for students to complete to receive feedback on their progress towards learning the class standards. Some students may choose not to complete their homework. In some classes in the past, homework completion counting towards the final grade may have “masked” a student's overall grade. In a standards-based grading system, it does not, however students who have not yet demonstrated understanding of a standard (and/or are not satisfied with their current grade) have the opportunity to improve their grade. Two of our grading guidelines state...[emphasis added]
  1. Students will be allowed **multiple opportunities** to demonstrate their understanding of classroom standards in various ways. Retakes and revisions will be allowed.
  2. Teachers will determine grade book entries by considering multiple points of data **emphasizing the most recent data** and provide evidence to support their determination.

### How does this impact Lakeview Elementary report cards?

Lakeview Elementary reports students' levels of understanding already on its report cards. The standards on the report cards will eventually change due to implementation of the required Iowa Core essential concepts and skills, however the process of reporting student learning will remain the same.

### Additional resources:

- Grading guidelines, additional frequently asked questions, a detailed background and timeline are available at [www.tinyurl.com/scsdsbg](http://www.tinyurl.com/scsdsbg)
- A brief video describing standards-based grading is available at [www.tinyurl.com/scsdsbgvideo](http://www.tinyurl.com/scsdsbgvideo)