

# How to GRADE FOR LEARNING

Linking Grades to Standards

FOURTH EDITION

**Ken O'Connor**

Forewords by Garnet Hillman and Rick Stiggins





## Educator Contribution

**Becca Lindahl, EdD**

*Professional Learning and Leadership Consultant  
Heartland AEA 11, Johnston, Iowa*

### How Do We Even Start All of This?

Some schools and districts, in their beginning stages of standards-based grading, study and then figure out how to implement SBG practices with a model or a framework in mind. But many more do not. I have worked with schools and districts in my consultative/coaching support role, have worked with districts and schools in states outside my own, have listened to participants at conferences, and have read books on standards-based grading. Lots of educators understand the principles, but they often have a big question or two that they cannot get their heads around easily: How do we even start all this? How long does implementation last? Many educators read good books on this subject; find the standards-based grading guidelines and principles kind of fascinating, logical, and sensible; and strive to implement those right away. They don't necessarily plan to do anything beyond implementing the guiding principles because this is how their initiatives and professional development have gone in the past. I'd offer that for this particular educational change of standards-based grading, it is imperative to, yes, do the reading and study, but then, *plan* to create goals and build a framework or model in order to implement well.

First, let's think big picture through key components of large-scale implementation, then get some details into a framework, with a timeline embedded. You'll read through the key components a little further down. For just a moment, let's think solely of the key component of *vision*. Remember: hold off on a timeline, and hold off on simply implementing the SBG guidelines and principles. Think in terms of key components. Alright . . . *vision before timeline*.

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It's critical to establish *vision and support* for the vision before establishing a timeline. Many districts and schools make a misstep when they try to outline the next three years and then fill in those three years with what they think fits in the timeline. Many schools are not used to having the implementation of a new initiative last beyond a couple years, maybe three at most. I'd offer that for a break from the past, as standards-based learning and grading is, it is important to articulate a vision of the work—what classrooms will look like and sound like when the work is in full implementation—and other components and then figure out how progression of work will happen over time. *Let the work drive the timeline*, not vice versa.

The framework outlined and described further on reflects how the "big-picture" key components play out in a school year's time, year after year. For example, when the *vision* of changing over to a standards-based learning system (including grading and reporting) is articulated for a district, it is articulated not only by top leadership but then by other key people as well, such as building leaders, teacher leaders, and perhaps even student and parent leaders. Maybe there's a representative *task force* gathered from the beginning of the vision. Over time, this task force, which helped articulate and relay the vision, still has a role to play. Perhaps some adjustments need to be made to the vision. Perhaps some work they did at the very beginning, concerning the vision, needs to be reviewed and updated over time.

As you read through the key components, you see the definitions, players, and actions. You then read through the framework—which is the outline of the implementation of standards-based learning and grading—and you will see the key components explained in detail through the years of implementation. Let's get started.

## Key Components

**Vision:** clarity of vision means a model that is scalable and easily communicated; contains guiding practices; work of task force; needs to be done prior to implementation and stakeholder communication; contains clear outcomes for transition and case for change

**Leadership:** superintendent and director of teaching and learning; coalition of the willing; specifically identified teachers with social influence

**Curriculum and Assessment:** most significant piece of the puzzle; overhaul of course organization (topics, scales, and assessment creation and alignment); redefine role of instructional materials

**Stakeholder Communication:** critical but we must have clarity of vision before we communicate; clarity builds confidence; common literature in multiple languages; teacher and student testimonials

**Professional Development:** training structured around guiding practices; principals/school leaders first; methods include face to face, online, and job embedded

**Monitoring and Program Evaluation:** metrics need to be identified during the planning for implementation and shared with stakeholders

**Reporting Student Learning:** SIS (student information system) compatibility; custom report card; separating behavior from academics



FRAMEWORK: IMPLEMENTATION OUTLINE

KEY COMPONENTS

VISION

LEADERSHIP

	2012–2013 Preparing to Implement	2013–2014 Middle School Teacher Leaders	2014–2015 All Middle Schools + Ninth-Grade Courses	2015–2016 Tenth-Grade Courses + Fourth and Fifth Grades (can include elementary extended core/specials such as art, music, PE, and world languages)	2016–2017 Eleventh-Grade Courses + Grades K–1 and 2–3	2017–2018 Twelfth-Grade Courses All Elementary
VISION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force made up of teachers, administrator, ELL, SPED, GT, curriculum, assessment</li> <li>• Adopted six guiding practices and outlined classroom application in a common teacher handbook</li> <li>• Addressed the “how” in the teacher handbook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force updates handbook based on teacher feedback throughout implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force updates handbook based on teacher feedback throughout implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force updates handbook based on teacher feedback throughout implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force updates handbook based on teacher feedback throughout implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task force updates handbook based on teacher feedback throughout implementation</li> </ul>
LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on mindset and guiding practices (developed by task force)</li> <li>• Prepare for stakeholder communication</li> <li>• Identification of the willing teachers (socially influential)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators attend training with teachers</li> <li>• Support and monitor implementation</li> <li>• Conduct parent meetings</li> <li>• Respond to community concerns and keep school board updated (see monitoring)</li> <li>• Allow first implementers to share their learning with school leadership team</li> <li>• Begin leading school-based PD (professional development) to prepare for next year</li> <li>• High school—focus on mindset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead teachers (five) and administrators facilitate training with teachers in middle schools</li> <li>• Support and monitor implementation</li> <li>• Conduct parent meetings</li> <li>• Respond to community concerns</li> <li>• Teaching &amp; Learning Department leads first cohort of ninth-grade teachers through SRG training</li> <li>• Continuous cycle of feedback and revision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing support of implementation</li> <li>• Conduct parent meetings</li> <li>• Respond to community concerns</li> <li>• Continuous cycle of feedback and revision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing support of implementation</li> <li>• Conduct parent meetings</li> <li>• Respond to community concerns</li> <li>• Continuous cycle of feedback and revision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing support of implementation</li> <li>• Conduct parent meetings</li> <li>• Respond to community concerns</li> <li>• Continuous cycle of feedback and revision</li> </ul>

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FRAMEWORK: IMPLEMENTATION OUTLINE

KEY COMPONENTS

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

2012–2013  
Preparing to Implement

- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision (middle school courses)
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-point proficiency scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale

2013–2014  
Middle School  
Teacher Leaders

- Identify which courses will convert each year and develop timeline (K–12)
- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision for identified courses
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-level scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale

2014–2015  
All Middle Schools +  
Ninth-Grade Courses

- Identify which courses will convert each year and develop timeline (K–12)
- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision for identified courses
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-level scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale
- Revise scales for previous years' courses based on teacher feedback and implementation

2015–2016  
Tenth-Grade Courses +  
Fourth and Fifth Grades  
(can include elementary  
extended core/specials  
such as art, music, PE,  
and world languages)

- Identify which courses will convert each year and develop timeline (K–12)
- Develop elementary instructional materials usage guidance (tight on standards, loose on materials)
- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision for identified courses
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-level scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale
- Revise scales for previous years' courses based on teacher feedback and implementation

2016–2017  
Eleventh-Grade Courses +  
Grades K–1 and 2–3

- Identify which courses will convert each year and develop timeline (K–12)
- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision for identified courses
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-level scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale
- Revise scales for previous years' courses based on teacher feedback and implementation

2017–2018  
Twelfth-Grade Courses  
All Elementary

- Identify which courses will convert each year and develop timeline (K–12)
- Identify teams of teacher leaders to work on curriculum revision for identified courses
- Divide courses into reporting topics (on report card)
- Develop common four-level scales for each topic
- Develop common formative assessments for each scale
- Revise scales for previous years' courses based on teacher feedback and implementation



STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is internal only while visioning is happening (task force, school leaders)</li> <li>• Clearly articulated implementation plan</li> <li>• Create case for change: grade correlation studies, number of grading scales in SIS, research on best practices, equity, failure rates</li> <li>• Develop website to house all information for teachers and stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with school board to communicate case for change, clear vision, and implementation plan</li> <li>• Develop district-wide written communication for parents in multiple languages</li> <li>• Create common PowerPoints for parent meetings at schools</li> <li>• Develop student orientation videos to ensure common message</li> <li>• Parent portal guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each school leads parent meetings using district-created literature and resources</li> <li>• Parent surveys</li> <li>• One-on-one parent meetings as needed</li> <li>• Parent portal guidance</li> <li>• Provide updates to school board</li> <li>• Update website with teacher and student testimonials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each school leads parent meetings using district-created literature and resources</li> <li>• Parent surveys</li> <li>• One-on-one parent meetings as needed</li> <li>• Parent portal guidance</li> <li>• Elementary begins parent communication (spring) for fall launch</li> <li>• Provide updates to school board</li> <li>• Update website with teacher and student testimonials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based communication</li> <li>• Provide updates to school board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based communication</li> <li>• Provide updates to school board</li> </ul>
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PD for task force = book studies + external experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly PD and support for middle school teacher leaders</li> <li>• PD based on guiding practices and cognitive complexity + Infinite Campus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly PD and support for high school teachers</li> <li>• PD based on guiding practices and cognitive complexity + Infinite Campus</li> <li>• School-based PLCs (collaborative teams)</li> <li>• District PLCs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer and monthly PD and support for high school and Grades 4/5 teachers</li> <li>• PD based on guiding practices and cognitive complexity + Infinite Campus</li> <li>• School-based PLCs</li> <li>• District PLCs</li> <li>• Office of Schools (OOS) directors support and coach principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer and monthly PD and support for high schools and Grades 2/3, K/1 teachers</li> <li>• PD based on guiding practices and cognitive complexity + Infinite Campus</li> <li>• School-based PLCs</li> <li>• District PLCs</li> <li>• Office of Schools directors support and coach principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer and monthly PD and support for high school teachers</li> <li>• PD based on guiding practices and cognitive complexity + Infinite Campus</li> <li>• School-based PLCs</li> <li>• District PLCs</li> <li>• Office of Schools directors support and coach principals</li> </ul>
MONITORING AND PROGRAM EVALUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish baseline: grade correlation, failure rates, teacher beliefs inventory</li> <li>• Articulate action plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher perceptions,</li> <li>• student perceptions,</li> <li>• grade correlation,</li> <li>• failure rates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor action plan and make adjustments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher perceptions,</li> <li>• student perceptions,</li> <li>• grade correlation,</li> <li>• failure rates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor action plan and make adjustments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher perceptions,</li> <li>• student perceptions,</li> <li>• grade correlation,</li> <li>• failure rates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor action plan and make adjustments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher perceptions,</li> <li>• student perceptions,</li> <li>• grade correlation,</li> <li>• failure rates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor action plan and make adjustments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher perceptions,</li> <li>• student perceptions,</li> <li>• grade correlation,</li> <li>• failure rates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor action plan and make adjustments</li> </ul>

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FRAMEWORK: IMPLEMENTATION OUTLINE

KEY COMPONENTS

REPORTING STUDENT LEARNING

2012–2013 Preparing to Implement	2013–2014 Middle School Teacher Leaders	2014–2015 All Middle Schools + Ninth-Grade Courses	2015–2016 Tenth-Grade Courses + Fourth and Fifth Grades (can include elementary extended core/specials such as art, music, PE, and world languages)	2016–2017 Eleventh-Grade Courses + Grades K–1 and 2–3	2017–2018 Twelfth-Grade Courses All Elementary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIS (Infinite Campus) programming and SRG report card design (most significant amount of time)</li> <li>• Clean up course numbers so they are consistent from school to school</li> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom gradebooks to be pushed out by course number</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean up course numbers so they are consistent from school to school</li> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom gradebooks to be pushed out by course number</li> <li>• Begin teacher training on Infinite Campus</li> <li>• Troubleshooting based on frequent feedback</li> <li>• Onsite support and system for reporting issues to technology team</li> <li>• Two report cards: traditional and standards based</li> <li>• Parent Portal training and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean up course numbers so they are consistent from school to school</li> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom gradebooks to be pushed out by course number</li> <li>• Standards-based report card for middle school</li> <li>• 2 report cards for high school: traditional and standards-based (some SRG courses and some non-SRG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean up course numbers so they are consistent from school to school</li> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom grade books to be pushed out by course number</li> <li>• 2 report cards for high school: traditional and standards-based (some SRG courses and some non-SRG courses)</li> <li>• Teacher training on Infinite Campus</li> <li>• Parent Portal training and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean up course numbers so they are consistent from school to school</li> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom gradebooks to be pushed out by course number</li> <li>• Two report cards for high school: traditional and standards based (some SRG courses and some non-SRG courses)</li> <li>• Teacher training on Infinite Campus</li> <li>• Grades 4/5 report card converts to standards based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum/technology teams create custom gradebooks to be pushed out by course number</li> <li>• One standards-based report card for high school</li> <li>• K–3 report cards convert to standards based</li> <li>• Teacher training on Infinite Campus</li> <li>• Parent Portal training and support</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Adapted from Des Moines (Iowa) Public Schools Standards-Referenced Grading System, with permission, 2016.