

Standards-Referenced Grading: What's in it for you and your student?

Common grading practices, clear parent communication, high student expectations

Every School – Every Classroom

So...What Has Changed?

Then	Now
• Students receive a letter grade	• Students receive a scale score toward mastery of standards
• Homework assigned and graded	• Homework assigned as practice
• Multiple ways to show what students know and can do	• Multiple ways to show what students know and can do
• Academics and behaviors mixed together into a grade	• Academics and behaviors reported separately
• Individual teachers develop grading practices and policies	• Common district-wide grading practices
• Grade books that track assignments	• Grade books that track progress toward standards
• 100 point scale that emphasizes points	• 4 point scale that defines levels of learning & knowledge

What's more meaningful?

You visit the doctor for a physical exam and checkup.

Three days after your visit, a letter arrives in the mail with the results. Which is more helpful to you?

Health Check: *Grade of B*

Comment: *You're doing pretty well.*

Health Check: *Grade of B*

Comment: *Your health check grade is determined by these four factors:*

✓ Nutrition:	3	<i>meeting goal</i>
✓ Cholesterol:	4	<i>exceeding goal</i>
✓ Blood Pressure:	3	<i>meeting goal</i>
✓ Exercise:	1	<i>insufficient progress to goal</i>


The above Health Check on the right provides you with specific information about key aspects of your health. This information will help you make decisions about how to improve your health in the future.

Standards-referenced grading provides this kind of clearer communication to help you and your student.

So... what do the numbers mean?

Let's consider how the scale helps you to better understand the number using '**exercise**' as the example:

4 – Exceeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual goes beyond the expectation in frequency, intensity and/or variety of exercise.
3 – Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual exercises 4-5 days per week. Heart rate reaches target levels consistently throughout workout. Includes both cardio AND strength training.
2 – Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual exercises 2-3 days per week. Heart rate approaches target levels or reaches target levels occasionally. Workouts include cardio OR strength training.
1 – Insufficient Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual does not meet level 2 criteria.

Want to learn more? 

Des Moines Public Schools have begun a transition to a more helpful form of progress reporting. It might not seem all that "helpful" right now, as you're seeing things you haven't seen before, but let's take a look at how things are changing...

In the past in most schools (Des Moines and elsewhere), students used to receive a letter grade every term. These letter grades intended to send a message of how students were doing in school, but as we dug deeper into what was behind these grades, we learned that there was almost no consistency from school to school, or subject to subject or even classroom to classroom as to what this letter grade actually meant. Did your student's 'B' grade come as a result of earning 80-89% of the total points available during that term? Would she have been an 'A' student if it hadn't been for that one late assignment? Does she do a good job of completing all of her work on time? Is she helpful in the classroom? These all represent various reasons why students in the past received the letter grades they did each term. On top of it all, grading scales varied across a district, with sometimes up to 10 different scales in place in even one school!

What is hard to figure out from just a letter grade is what, exactly, can a student do well and what does she still need to work on? A 'B' at the end of the term won't tell you that a student is really strong when working with *fractions*, but struggles when working with *decimals and percentages* – all important skills in math class and in life beyond school.

As we move toward a "standards-referenced" approach to grading, parents can now expect to see how their students are doing on specific content and skills in each course. These are the "standards" for each course and they come from the Iowa Core State Standards, a state framework of what each student should know and be able to do by grade level.

As students start work on each new standard, teachers will track and report progress using 1's and 2's to designate *beginning* and *developing* work. With some practice, students will move on to 3-level work, which means they are performing as expected (*meeting standard*) for students at their grade level. From time to time, students might even complete a Level 4 task, which is *exceeding* the grade level expectation. All students will be encouraged and supported to work toward Level 4 tasks. At the end of each quarter, scores on each topic that has been taught will be reported out on the report card.

In addition to the academic scores, parents will also see scores for Citizenship and Employability Skills. Teachers use a common rubric to show students where they are in the areas of **Instruction, Work Completion, Working with Other Students, and Working with Adults**. Reporting on these skills separately shows students that these are important skills but it keeps them from distorting the academic grade.

How does all of this help parents? Well, it allows you to have conversations with your student about the types of work he is doing in school and to get more immediate snapshots of his progress. It defines what students need to know and be able to do to move to the next level. For all the reasons it helps you understand, it also helps their teachers. Teachers can work with groups of students based on their progress and avoid having to re-teach skills to students who already show they can do them.

Please visit our website at <http://grading.dmschools.org>. Click on the Parents tab to see resources and information, and click on the FAQ tab to see some questions & answers. Don't hesitate to contact your school with any other questions you might have.

Timeline for the Changes					
2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
District task force (comprised of teachers, administrators, and support personnel)	Middle school partial implementation (includes 5 teacher leaders from every middle school)	Middle school full implementation and select 9 th grade courses Elementary task force	System will follow students through high school 4 th & 5 th grade partial implementation begins	4 th & 5 th grade full implementation (math, literacy, social studies) K-3 partial implementation begins (math & literacy) K-5 full implementation for art, music, PE	→ K-5 full implementation for all content areas