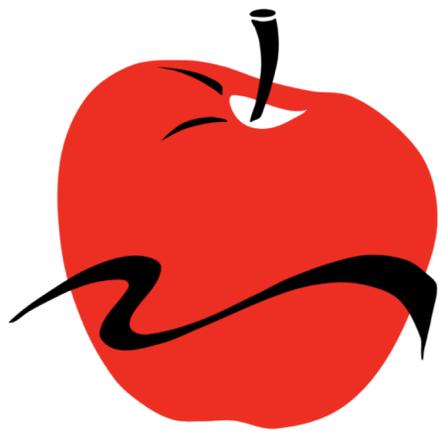


Elementary K-5  
Standards Based Grading  
Parent Handbook



**Decatur  
Public  
Schools**

*Educating for Success*

# What is a Standards–Based Approach?

*“Learning is an ongoing process and what matters is how much learning occurs, not when it occurs” ~ Robert Marzano*

A standards-based approach focuses on what a student knows, not how long it takes to get there. It measures how well a student understands the material and how they are progressing on their learning goals. It is based on a specific set of standards that students need to meet for each grade level. Teachers gather evidence to determine what each student has learned and how that student is progressing towards end of year expectations. This approach builds consistent grading practices throughout the district K-5.

The standards-based approach allows teachers to design instruction to give students multiple opportunities, if necessary, to demonstrate success, or provide enrichment if students are already meeting learning goals.

A standards-based approach also allows parents to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful in their learning. It provides better feedback to students, parents, teachers and administrators on what each student knows and is able to do based on academic standards and separately assesses the influence of work habits on student learning. For these reasons and more, Decatur Public Schools embarked on the journey to become a Standards Based Grading district beginning 2019-2020 for grades K-6, that has now evolved to K-5.



# **Why would Decatur Public Schools change grading and reporting?**

“Why would anyone want to change current grading practices? The answer is quite simple: Grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless.” (Marzano 2001)

Since the State of Illinois and Decatur Public Schools have implemented new learning standards and new curricula in many subjects, DPS has not updated grading, assessing, and reporting that mirror updated practices in classrooms.

Current Illinois Learning Standards are rigorous, and while the District has worked to match curricula to the standards, our District has yet to address how student learning and mastery of standards is assessed, graded and reported.



## **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRADITIONAL GRADING SYSTEM WITH LETTER GRADES VS. A STANDARDS BASED APPROACH TO GRADING?**

<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Standards Based</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One grade is given per assessment, <u>even if many different standards are tested.</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance ratings are given <u>per standard</u>, even when assessments contain multiple standards.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on a percentage system. Criteria used to determine grades are not always clear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on specific criteria by defining what it “looks like” to be successful on the standard. Rubrics are utilized for assessment feedback.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses an uncertain mix of achievement, attitude, effort and behavior. Uses penalties and extra credit that distort grades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures only achievement, while behaviors are reported separately. No penalties or bonuses are given.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everything goes in the grade book, regardless of its purpose.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected common assessments are used for reporting progress with many opportunities to demonstrate growth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grades are calculated using an averaging system--the worst grades averaged with the best</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasizes the most recent assessments more heavily to demonstrate learning that has occurred and does not penalize the student for the learning process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teacher calculates the grade and announces the decision to students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teacher discusses progress with students and provides feedback on learning goals throughout the learning process.</li> </ul>



# Standards-Based Grading

## Power Standards

### **Purpose of the Report Card:**

The purpose of this report card is to describe academic achievement and student skills based on our district's grade level learning expectations. It reflects student successes, guides improvements, and provides students opportunity for self-evaluation and reflection.

Although teachers are responsible for teaching all of Illinois Learning Standards, there are specific standards that teachers will be reporting to parents on a regular basis. These are referred to as **Power Standards** and reflect the standards that are critical for student success at that particular grade level. These standards tend to cross content areas, span grade levels and/or are skills that are considered as crucial building blocks for future lifelong learning.

Students will receive progress reports each quarter. The start of the first quarter entails baseline assessments. Therefore baseline assessments, in addition to formative assessments, during the first quarter will assist with determining the progress of students' mastery of the standard taught.

Midterm reports in quarters 1, 2, 3, and 4 will include performance ratings that communicate whether a student has mastered grade level standards, is progressing towards mastery or is showing limited progress towards current standards being taught. Comments may be given whether in free form or using pre-populated numerical comments.

These ratings are not a comparison of one student to another, but are a measure of the student's work toward mastering the **end-of-year standard**.

# PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS

Performance descriptors will replace the traditional A, B, C, D, F grading system beginning in 2019-2020. For each standard listed, students will be graded using the 1, 2, 3 scale. Many students may start the year with a 1. This does not convert to a D or F in a traditional grading system. It simply shows student progress toward end of year expectations.

## **3+ Exceeds Grade Level Standards**

The student may occasionally exceed grade level standard.

## **3 Consistently Meets Grade Level Standards**

The student understands and applies grade level concepts and skills.

## **2 Progressing Toward Grade Level Standards**

The student demonstrates partial understanding and application of skills and concepts taught in class.

## **1 Limited Progress of Grade Level Standards**

The student demonstrates a limited understanding and application of skills and concepts even with teacher support. Could potentially indicate an area of concern.

## **X Not Assessed this Quarter**

<b>This report card uses standards based grading based on Illinois State Standards.</b>				
<b>3+ = Exceeds Grade Level Standards</b>				
<b>3 = Consistently Meets Grade Level Standards</b>				
<b>2 = Progressing Toward Grade Level Standards</b>				
<b>1 = Limited Progress of Grade Level Stand</b>				
<b>X = Not Assessed this Quarter</b>				
<b>Kindergarten Reading Standards</b>				
	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
Identify 26 Upper Case Letters in Mixed Order Unknown Letters:				
Identify 26 Lower Case Letters in Mixed Order Unknown Letters:				

# Reporting Social Emotional Learning Standards

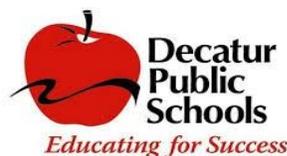
While we believe that work habits, social development, and emotional learning should not be factored into academic performance ratings, it is still very important to communicate progress on these skills.

As a district, we are making strides in becoming more trauma informed utilizing restorative practices. We acknowledge that these skills are valued in the outside world and are essential for preparing students for college, careers and other post-school endeavors.

Students will score either a:

- 1 (the student seldom or never shows the given behavior/work habit),
- 2 (the student sometimes shows the given behavior/work habit), or
- 3 (the student consistently shows the given behavior/work habit) in the ten Social Emotional Learning Standards:
  - Practices self-control
  - Seeks help and asks questions
  - Completes work, stays on task, shows efforts on work, motivated to learn
  - Shows kindness and empathy
  - Shows respect for others and their unique qualities
  - Uses kind words and manners
  - Works cooperatively with others, respects others, demonstrates conflict resolution skills
  - Makes good decisions that are safe and positive for the entire class
  - Manages materials, take care of class items
  - Listens, follows directions, and keeps the classroom clean and in order

Social / Emotional Behaviors	1	2	3
Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior. (practices self-control)	Seldom or Never	Sometimes	Consistently



# Grading and Reporting Guidelines At A Glance

- **Guideline #1** - Teachers will only include scores that relate to the achievement of the grade level standards.
  
- **Guideline #2** - Teachers will use district guidelines to assign a performance rating on common assessments and progress reports. Homework will not be factored into a student's grade.
  
- **Guideline #3** - Students will have retake opportunities with the goal of reaching a "3" on Power Standards by the end of the year and to demonstrate continued growth throughout the school year.
  
- **Guideline #4** - Teachers will use district-developed common assessments and rubrics to monitor instruction and assessment on standards.
  
- **Guideline #5** - Students with an IEP or 504 Plan will receive allowable accommodations on common assessments to give an accurate picture of progress on the standards.

More specific guidelines can be found on pages 9-12 of this handbook.

# Guideline #1

## **Progress reporting only includes scores that relate to the achievement of grade level standards**

- Data collected on non-academic factors (effort, participation, attendance, attitude, behavior, work completion) will be reported using a 1-3 scale on Social Emotional Standards and will **not** be included in the student's academic progress reporting.
- Teachers will not offer extra credit or bonus points.
- Homework is not to be required but rather the discretion of the classroom teacher for purposeful practice. Homework will not alter the score given on the standards based report card.
- We should communicate to parents that the goal is for mastery of each standard by the end of the year, not just the end of quarter. If a student has a 1 for Q1- it doesn't mean they're failing. Communication is key!



# Guideline #2

Teachers will use district guidelines to assign performance ratings on common assessments and progress reports.

- Teachers will follow grade level guidelines for assigning a 1-3 rating on common assessments based on district rubrics.
- Teachers will refrain from using percentages, numerical fractions (ex. 8/10), or other “scoring” on formative assessments or in-class assignments. Instead, they will provide explicit feedback, the 1-3 scale, and/or a mark showing completion.
- Teachers will assign a summative performance rating on each power standard at the end of the quarter on the report card based on the following criteria:

***\*General guideline: The most recent assessments should influence the final performance rating more than earlier assessments in each quarter. Focus on progress.***

<b>If the students' profile of ratings is:</b>	<b>Then the final performance rating is:</b>
If the student has all 1's	1
If the student has all 2's	2
If the student has all 3's	3
If there is a mix of any three numbers	Teachers review the student's progression and use professional judgment and other academic evidence
If there is a mix of any two numbers with the lower number being the most recent	The lower number
If there is a mix of any two numbers with the higher number being the most recent	The higher number

# Guideline #3

Students will have retake opportunities with the goal of reaching a “3” on Power Standards by the end of the year and will be provided with opportunities to demonstrate continued growth throughout the school year.

- Teachers will offer reteaching and retakes if the student is not meeting the expectation outlined for his/her grade level power standards at checkpoints during the year.
  - There is no minimum number of retakes
- Teachers will use alternative ways to re-administer assessments or administer sections of the original assessment to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of end of year standards.



# Guideline #4

Teachers will use district-developed common assessments and rubrics to monitor instruction and assessment on standards.

- A collection of assessments for Math and English Language Arts will be reported for the Power Standards for each school year. Math common assessments are non-negotiable. Any ELA common assessment linked in the teacher rubric should also be given.
- Mastery is a year long process and possibly more. Common assessments will measure progress on year long expectations and report on progress towards those expectations.

# Guideline #5

Students with an IEP or 504 Plan will receive allowable accommodations on common assessments to give an accurate picture of progress on the standards.

The issues of whether, or when, to change the way a student is graded on assignments or how his or her report card grade is calculated has been a recurring topic of discussion in professional literature. As might be expected, the response differs depending on the nature and severity of the student's disability. The DPS Core Standards Based Grading Committee recommends the following:

Learners with Mild Disabilities (would we subtitle this Cross Categorical?)

- Grade students with mild disabilities in the same way as their peers without disabilities, unless the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines the need for a change based on the student's needs.
- Do not change grading practices for a student just because he or she receives special education services. The IEP teams must seek to balance the rights of the learner to participate in the general education curriculum, including the grading system, with the right to individualized services and supports that reduce barriers to educational progress.
- Address low or failing grades through problem solving that considers whether additional accommodations or supports are appropriate and whether the level of work is too advanced for the learner at the present time.
  - Students with an IEP or 504 Plan who are being instructed on Illinois Learning Standards will take district common assessments in mathematics.
  - If a student has an accommodation written in his/her IEP, **the accommodation will be provided on the common assessment.** It is critical for teachers to provide scaffolding and support for students to ensure the accommodation maintains the level of rigor and does not modify grade level expectations.
    - Accommodations (e.g., extended time, alternative response) should not affect the way a learner is graded because the learning goals and standards remain the same
- Classroom grades come from teachers, IEP goals come from SPED.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. Why did we decide to go to a standards-based approach? Can't we just go back to a traditional letter grading system?**

A standards-based approach allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful in their learning. It tells us what students have actually learned by measuring a student's progress on grade level standards. Rather than receiving an overall grade for a subject, parents will see ratings for specific skills their child needs to know to reach grade level standards. For example, a reading grade in Kindergarten involves skills such as recognizing letter sounds, identifying letters, understanding what was read, recognizing parts of a book, etc. A student may be able to successfully read all of their letters and letter sounds, but may experience difficulty understanding what was read. This is important information for parents and teachers and it is often hidden within one overall letter grade.

Traditional grading also includes subjective factors like attendance, effort, and attitude, which might influence the grade positively or negatively. In a standards based approach, these behaviors are reported separately in order to portray a more accurate report of student progress.

A standards-based system also focuses on the most recent, consistent level of performance. Traditional grading systems use averaging to calculate grades, which often penalizes students for the learning process.

## **2. If we're only reporting on power standards, how do I know my student is getting a complete education with all Illinois Learning Standards?**

Experts in the field have conducted research and determined we need 71% more time than we currently have available to teach all of the standards in depth. Some experts say it would take 22 years of education to teach them all. Grade level teams of teachers identified the Power Standards as those standards that are critical for student success. These standards tend to cross content areas, span grade levels and/or are skills that are considered crucial building blocks for future lifelong learning.

### **3. How are the performance ratings defined and what do they mean?**

The performance ratings provide teachers and parents information about whether a student is meeting, progressing, or below the standard and expectation. These ratings are not a comparison of one student to another, but are a measure of the student's work against the standard. These ratings are defined in more detail on page 6 of this guidebook.

### **4. How was the decision made to use 1-3 performance ratings?**

A standards-based workgroup was formed to refine our system of grading during the 2019-2020 school year. This workgroup included representation from each K-6 elementary and K-8 building and grade level in the form of teachers, instructional specialists, and administrators. The 1-3 performance scale provides more definitive descriptors of performance than our previous A, B, C, D, F scale. It also offers a better understanding of student performance and allows for more differentiation in instruction.

### **5. How will each teacher determine how to assign a 1, 2, 3, or 3+ (in some occasions)?**

Grade level teams are working together to ensure a consistent approach in determining these ratings. Common assessments and rubrics were developed that outline the criteria for each of these ratings for each standard on the report card.

### **6. Will I get anything printed and sent home at the quarter?**

Yes. Each quarter, you will receive a copy of your child's report card on the standardized assessments completed that quarter. Midterm progress reports will also be sent home for Quarters 1, 2, 3, and 4.

### **7. What will teachers do when a student is not performing well?**

Teachers will provide students with additional opportunities for reteaching. Teachers will also continue to differentiate for students as we have in the past. This approach will provide us another measure to ensure we are meeting the needs of ALL of our students.

## **8. What about students who want to move beyond the standards?**

Teachers are working to provide enrichment and challenge for these students as we always have. This may take the form of enrichment assignments, higher level questioning, extension to higher grade level material, projects, etc. The standards based approach allows us to identify students who may need this extension or enrichment much earlier than in a traditional grading system.

## **9. If homework does not count as part of the student's grade, how will we teach them the importance of this work and motivate them to turn it in?**

As a district, we realize that homework and practice tied directly to learning targets is an important component of student achievement. It is of the teacher's discretion to provide homework opportunities. Providing students with nonjudgmental written or verbal feedback enables teachers to assess student understanding and provides the student safe opportunities to practice - without judgment.

## **10. Why are we allowing students to turn in late work or re-do work without penalty? How does this teach responsibility and accountability?**

In a standards-based system, the emphasis is on learning. When a student doesn't do the work, the inherent consequence is that he or she doesn't learn the content or practice the skill.

Rather than applying academic consequences by lowering a grade, teachers will be working with students to ensure the work is completed. By enforcing this behavior, students will be held accountable for work completion and will not be able to avoid this important responsibility.

When we do not allow a student to turn in late work or re-do work, we deny that student the opportunity to grow character traits that are vital to student achievement, such as perseverance and persistence.

## **11. Are there resources I can view about standards based reporting?**

The resources listed on page 17 were used by our standards-based workgroup to refine our philosophy. There are also additional resources listed that may be helpful in understanding the standards-based approach.

**12. Will Standards Based Grading be investigated for Middle School/High School?**

At this time there are no plans to expand the standards based grading system beyond 5th grade.

**13. How do accommodations affect grading for students with an IEP or 504 Plan?**

Accommodations (e.g., extended time, alternative response) should not affect the way a learner is graded because the learning goals and standards remain the same.

## Resources

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