Dear Parents/Guardians,

As Decatur Public Schools #61 schools continue to improve teaching and learning for all students, we know that parents and families are our most valuable partner. This is especially true as the District adopts more rigorous standards for what every child should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level K-5. The Illinois Learning Standards in Language Arts and Mathematics set high expectations for students, staff and schools. It is important to clearly communicate your child’s progress toward these more rigorous expectations. A standards-based report card provides a tool to accurately communicate the progress your child is making.

These learning targets were identified by district teachers as the foundational learning that students need to master in order to be successful in the next grade level. The report card communicates whether or not a student is Mastering, Progressing or Below Expectations for mastery of each standard. These performance descriptors are explained in more detail later in this document.

The following K-5 Standard-Based Report Card Parent Handbook provides answers to frequently asked questions, a sample report card, and a description of the performance levels used in standards-based reporting. I hope that you will find the Parent Handbook and the standards-based report card system helpful in understanding your child’s progress.
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 and modified to grades K-5 beginning 2020-2021.
Why would Decatur Public Schools change grading and reporting?

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.

Standards based grading tells what students have actually learned by measuring a student’s progress on grade level standards.
What's the difference between a traditional grading system with letter grades vs. a Standards Based approach to grading?

Traditional Standards Based

- One grade is given per assessment, even if many different standards are tested.
- Based on a percentage system. Criteria used to determine grades are not always clear.
- Uses an uncertain mix of achievement, attitude, effort and behavior. Uses penalties and extra credit that distort grades.
- Everything goes in the grade book, regardless of its purpose.
- Grades are calculated using an averaging system—the worst grades averaged with the best.
- The teacher calculates the grade and announces the decision to students.
- Performance ratings are given per standard, even when assessments contain multiple standards.
- Based on specific criteria by defining what it “looks like” to be successful on the standard. Rubrics are utilized for assessment feedback.
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 student opportunities 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. During much of the
beginning of the first quarter, we are taking baseline assessments to see where your child is starting the year.

Progress 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.

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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social / Emotional Behaviors</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior. (practices self-control)</td>
<td>Seldom or Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Consistently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 8-12 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.
- Teachers will not give zeros for missing or incomplete work. Teachers will apply other consequences for these behaviors.
- Homework is not 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.
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 mid-quarter and/or 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.*

If the students’ profile of ratings is: Then the final performance rating is:

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
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.
- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

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.

Teachers are still responsible for teaching all of Illinois Learning Standards and have mapped out how they will teach these standards throughout the school year. By taking this approach, teachers are able to be consistent and focus on in-depth instruction and learning to ensure students leave each grade level with the foundational skills and content they need to be successful at the next level.

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 for the 2020-2021 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 to middle school and high school.

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


O’Connor, K. (2010). *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* (No