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Standards Based Grading Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is Standards Based Grading? In a standards based system, teachers report what students know and are able to do in relation to the Michigan standards. Standards Based Grading includes:

- The improvement of student achievement of required learning outcomes in all content areas.
- The mastery of defined learning outcomes instead of the accumulation of points.
- Reporting of student achievement toward meeting learning outcomes at a given time through various forms of assessment.
- A record keeping system that provides teachers with information that allows them to adjust learning practices to meet the needs of students.
- A system that encourages student reflection and responsibility.

Why are we changing to Standards Based Grading (SBG)? As a district, Romeo Community Schools wants to improve learning for every student. Research supports SBG as a method of reporting and communication that will help students learn more effectively through better feedback. Providing specific and frequent feedback has proven to be a factor in increasing student achievement. SBG aligns more closely with this type of feedback.

What is the purpose of SBG? The purpose is to increase student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress towards learning standards in a timely, accurate, fair, and specific manner. SBG also allows teachers to report student progress *specifically* on the standards. We will have a common language and practice across our district as to our expectations of students at each grade level, K-5, and each content area. SBG accurately communicates student achievement to students, parents, and educators. Work habits and behavior are reported separately.

How is SBG different? Traditional grading averages a student's achievement data with other characteristics, such as work habits. SBG removes extraneous factors, and focuses solely on academic achievement. Other characteristics are reported separately. The student's grade more accurately represents the progress toward proficiency in the state learning standards than traditional grading does. Subject areas are subdivided into big ideas related to the standards and their respective learning outcomes that students must master. Each target is assessed. Scores from activities that are provided solely for practice are not included in the final assessment of the learning outcome. The influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning is reported separately from academics.

What are the advantages of SBG? Learning outcomes are clearly articulated to students throughout instruction through unit goals and daily learning targets. Via the report card, parents and students can see which learning outcomes students have mastered, and which need additional time. Some students struggle at the beginning of units, fail assessments, and give up. With SBG, the door remains open to achieving the standards.

What are the disadvantages of Standards Based Grading? Change is difficult. Parents, students and teachers are accustomed to seeing grades in the form of percentages, or letter grades, which don't tell us what specifically a student has or has not learned. With SBG, the goal for students is to be aware of specific learning strengths and weakness, and to improve learning, rather than earn a score.

Why aren't grades just averaged, like before? The purpose of SBG is to report what students know, and are able to do. Averaging does not represent an accurate picture of where a student is in his/her learning. A student who struggles at the beginning of a grading period and receives poor grades, but who keeps working and by the end of the grading period can clearly demonstrate learning in the subject, should receive a grade that reflects that learning.

How are we going to teach our kids that in the real world, or on tests such as CSAP, ACT, SAT, etc., they must do their best the first time, or on a continuous basis? Our goal is student learning. All students learn at different rates, and at times have issues that might affect their testing ability on a given day. Many real life final tests, such as driver's license, ACT, SAT, bar exam, etc., offer multiple opportunities for mastery with no penalty for number of attempts. With SBG there are still deadlines within units, and some practice work is time bound. There are deadlines for assignments, per teacher discretion, beyond which late work will not be accepted.

How will student progress be measured? The Michigan standards were used to create report card criteria that is clear and concise for parents.

Teachers collect evidence of student learning through observations, class work, projects, and assessment data, then evaluate overall performance using the following scale:

- 1 - Does not meet grade level expectations
- 2 - Progressing toward grade level expectations
- 3 - Meets grade level expectations

Have schools that use SBG experienced significant increases in student achievement? Research on Standards Based Grading shows overwhelmingly that students learn their subjects more thoroughly, and perform higher as they advance in their education. The foundation for the better performance is the feedback that SBG is built on. Students, parents, and teachers are all more aware of how the student is performing on each standard, and therefore can more specifically target the student's strengths and weaknesses. Evidence can be seen in the work of researchers such as James Popham, Douglas Reeves, Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, Jay McTighe, Grant Wiggins, Rick Stiggins, Thomas Guskey, Susan Brookhart, and Ken O'Connor, to name several.