

The Shelby County Public School District uses standards based grading in all K-12 schools. The district mission is to prepare wise students who master standards, lead by example, and embrace social responsibility. We believe standards based grading is important to all stakeholders in indicating progress toward mastering the goals for each grade level and preparing students for success beyond high school.

What is Standards-Based Grading?

Standards-based grading measures your student's mastery of standards for a class. The student is assessed to see if they know the material using a variety of tasks, assessments, and observations. Your student's progress will be based on all of the evidence their teacher collects demonstrating mastery of the essential standards.

What is the purpose of Standards-Based grading?

The purposes of standards based grading are:

- to guide instruction and improve student learning
- to provide the teacher, student, and parent an accurate picture of what the student knows and is able to do.
- to support and encourage conversations between the teacher, student, and parent about how the student can master the standards in a particular class or grade level.

What is the difference in “traditional grading” and Standards-Based Grading?

Most people are familiar with the traditional grading system and letter grades, ABCD and F. Even though this system is familiar, it is often misleading. Take, for example, a B- 85%. What exactly does that grade tell you? For some students it may mean they understand some of the concepts presented but not all? So what skills have they mastered? Where are they lacking? For others a B may mean that they understand the concepts and skills but turn in very little work or complete in class tasks so work habits are impacting the grade for the class.

Unlike the traditional letter graded system, a standards-based grading system measures a student's mastery of grade-level standards. It separates the work habits associated with behavior and doing school, but instead focuses on academic performance around the standards. In addition, when reporting the teacher can prioritize the most recent, consistent level of performance. Thus a student who may have struggled at the introduction to a standard within a unit, may still be able to demonstrate mastery of key content/concepts by the end of the unit. Take for example the B 85% referenced above. Once that grade is assigned you may not always have a clear indication of what your student has mastered and what they need to continue to improve upon. Early quiz

scores that were low would be averaged together with more proficient performance later in the course, resulting in a lower overall grade than current performance indicates.

Standards-based report cards separate academic performance from work habits and behavior in order to provide parents a more accurate view of a student's progress in both academic and behavioral areas. Variables such as effort, participation, timeliness, cooperation, attitude and attendance are reported separately, not as not as an indicator of a student's academic performance.

What are the benefits of Standards-Based Grading?

Some of the many benefits of standards-based grading include:

- Targeted and intentional instruction aligned to the standard
- Progress can be tracked per standard rather than whole subject/class
- Does not penalize students for mistakes made during the learning process
- Multiple opportunities for feedback to student during the learning process
- Enables the teacher to more specifically target individual needs

What are the disadvantages?

As with any change in a traditional practice, there will be difficulties. The traditional grading system has been in use for decades. It will be a lengthy process to adjust and grow with this change. However it will be worth it in the end. Research indicates that this grading practice supports students learning content at deeper level leading to better performance in college and in areas beyond high school.

How does Standard-Based Grading work?

Unlike traditional grading in which data is collected over time and averaged with other data, Standards Based Grading focuses only on data collected around attainment of outcomes that have been identified from standards. Along the journey to mastery of a standard there will be multiple times that your student may have indications in Infinite Campus or through other reporting tools that they have not reached mastery on a standard. It is important to remember that mastery of a complete standard will take time; some standards even take an entire school year. Because learning is a process that takes place over time, each new task, assessment, or observation will be used by the teacher to provide feedback to the student about what to focus on next.

How will mastery be determined?

Teacher Leaders worked to developed a mastery scale to guide decisions in determining mastery. This mastery scale will be aligned with the language of the

standards within the content area. All school levels have a scale similar to the elementary scale below. Please contact your child’s school for their adopted scale.

Mastery	The student can independently (unless otherwise noted in the standard) and apply the standard in a way that demonstrates understanding. He/she can transfer the skill to new situations.
Approaching Mastery	The student can sometimes apply the standard in a way that demonstrates understanding. The student may have or only mastery of part of the standard .
Developing	The student infrequently applies the standard and/or has of the skill. They need prompting or support to apply the standard in a way that demonstrates understanding.
Beginning	The student is just beginning to learn this skill. He/she may also demonstrate major misconceptions in the understanding or use of the skill in the standard. They may be the level of the standard, with a need for teacher support, in most circumstances.

What about students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), English Language Learners plan (ELL) or Talented and Gifted plans (TAG)?

Standards-based grading is applicable to students of all abilities and needs. In fact standards based grading provides all stakeholders a more accurate understanding of a student’s progress toward mastery. This will allow more effective personalization of learning. Teachers will work with the students and the specialized learning plans developed to make sure the appropriate accommodations, modifications, or extensions are made to support and progress learning. If your child is working below or above the level of the standard this will be indicated on the report card.

How do I talk with my child about his/her standards-based report card?

When discussing achievement with your child it is important to focus on the fact that learning is a process. Some standards are more difficult to grasp than others. More time or practice may be needed. In standards based grading students are offered multiple opportunities to learn, practice and demonstrate understanding. Take for example, a rating of Developing. If this rating is assigned to a standard that is just being introduced then the rating is appropriate. The goal is to move to the mastery rating by the end of the unit or year with the standards. On the journey to mastery continue your conversations with support and encourage a growth mindset with your child.

Why multiple chances to demonstrate mastery?

You may be concerned about the idea that giving a student multiple chances does not prepare students “for the real world.” That in the real world you must get it correct the first time. The goal of SCPS is student learning. Standards based grading provides teacher, students, and parents with accurate information on how students are learning. In addition we know that students learn at different rates and in different ways. Multiple opportunities allows students to show mastery when they are ready. In fact, that is almost always how things work in the real world. Take for example, driver license exams, ACT, GRE, MCAT, employee evaluations and others. Each time these are used and one does not meet the benchmark or criteria, feedback is given in some form and you are allowed to try again. These are not “one and done” opportunities. In most of the cases the final indication of mastery is taken from the most recent evidence, not the evidence when the person first began the job or took the assessment.

What if I have more questions?

The purpose of this document is to provide you with a basic understanding of standards based grading. If you would like more information or have additional questions please contact your child’s school. In addition you may contact Susan Dugle, Chief Academic Officer, or Rebecca Martin, Director of Curriculum Personalization at 502-633-2375