

Standards-Based Grading

Frequently Asked Questions



River Valley Middle High School
Three Oaks, MI

What is standards-based grading?

Standards-based grading measures your student's mastery of the reported standards for a class or how well your student understands the material in class. At the beginning of every unit, the teacher will break down the standards for the unit into smaller objectives and criteria using learning targets. During the unit, the student is assessed to see if they truly know the material using a variety of assessments, such as traditional pencil-and-paper tests, projects, discussions, or reports. The class grade will be based on all of the evidence the teacher collects demonstrating mastery of the reported standards.

The goal of this approach is to provide the teacher, student, and parent as accurate a picture as possible of the student's learning and to encourage a dialogue about how the student can master the material for the class. In particular, because learning is a process that takes place over time, each assessment will provide feedback for the student about what to focus on next, and the student will be allowed to retake assessments. If the new assessments shows a higher level of mastery, that new score replaces the old one. This can be done as long as the learning is still relevant. See grading policies on page 11 of the student handbook.

How is standards-based grading different from traditional grading?

In the traditional 100-point grading system, a student's grades are typically based on all of the work assigned in class, including classwork, homework, projects, quizzes, and tests. These scores are often arranged in the grade book based on the type of assignment rather than on the standards for the class. The grade may also include points for non-academic factors, such as participation, effort, or attitude.

Standards-based grading only accounts for assessments in the academic grade. Scores are based on assessments that allow the student to demonstrate their knowledge or skill. A student's scores from the assessments are tracked by the standards, which gives the teacher, student, and parent a very detailed picture of which standards a student has mastered. Non-academic factors like behavior, attitude, and attendance are not included in this grade and reported in a different manner.

Why is the district changing to standards-based grading?

The goal of the River Valley School District is to report grades that are accurate, consistent, meaningful, and supportive of learning, and the change to standards-based grading is an effort to reach that goal. Here is how standards-based grading addresses each of those four criteria:

- **Accurate:** By basing a student's grade on solely academic factors, the teacher creates a clear picture of what the student has learned without the influence of other factors. These other factors, such as effort and attitude, are still essential but are not part of the student's academic grade and are communicated separately.
- **Consistent:** For each unit, the teacher will provide learning targets that describe exactly what the student needs to master. Using these targets establishes clear expectations for mastery up front and applies them consistently throughout the unit and semester.

- **Meaningful:** A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates what learning has taken place. In a standards-based classroom, scores are recorded by the reported standards rather than by type (tests, homework etc.) making it easier to identify areas of strength and to address areas of concern for each student.
- **Supportive of Learning:** Standards-based grading supports learning by focusing on the material that has or has not been learned rather than on accumulating points to reach a certain total. The redo/retake policy we have adopted also supports student learning by allowing new levels of learning to replace old levels when a student shows improvement on an assessment.

What do the scores on the 4.0 scale mean?

The scores on the 4.0 scale each have a very specific meaning. They are:

- **4.0:** The student demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the material by completing advanced applications of the material.
- **3.0:** The student has mastered the complex, targeted knowledge and skills for the class
- **2.0:** The student understands the foundational material that supports the targeted learning but is still working to master the complex material for the class.
- **1.0:** The student is able to demonstrate an understanding of the foundational material for the class with help from the teacher but still struggles when working independently.
- **0.0:** Even with assistance from the teacher, the student shows no understanding of the material. A zero will not be given for missing work until the end of a grading period.

The intermediate scores of 0.5, 1.5, 2.5, and 3.5 are used to show that a student has shown partial mastery of the next level of learning. In particular, a score of 2.5 shows that a student has mastered all of the foundational material at the 2.0 level but has only shown partial mastery of the complex, targeted learning at the 3.0 level.

What is the grade scale for standards-based grading?

The 4.0 scale will be converted to a letter grade using the grading scale shown below.

A:	3.75 – 4.00	B-:	2.75 – 2.99	D+	1.50 – 1.74
A-:	3.50 – 3.74	C+:	2.50 – 2.74	D:	1.25 – 1.49
B+:	3.25 – 3.49	C:	2.00 – 2.49	D-:	1.00 – 1.24
B:	3.00 – 3.24	C-:	1.75 – 1.99	F:	0.00 – 0.99

This conversion scale sets clear expectations for student learning. In order to receive credit for a class, a student must, with help, show an understanding all of the foundational skills taught in a class. The C range shows that the student understands all of the foundational skills without help, and the B range requires a student to master all of the complex, targeted knowledge in the class. Finally, to receive an A- or A, the student must show an in-depth, advanced understanding of the material.

What does a percentage mean in Powerschool?

The chart below shows the alignment between the different scales from letter grade to standards-based grade.

This is the letter grade	=	This is the traditional grade range (%)	=	This is the standards-based grade range
A		95 – 100		3.75 – 4.00
A-		90 – 94		3.50 – 3.74
B+		87 – 89		3.25 – 3.49
B		83 – 86		3.00 – 3.24
B-		80 – 82		2.75 – 2.99
C+		77 – 79		2.50 – 2.74
C		73 – 76		2.00 – 2.49
C-		70 – 72		1.75 – 1.99
D+		67 – 69		1.50 – 1.74
D		63 – 66		1.25 – 1.49
D-		60 – 62		1.00 – 1.24
F		0 – 59		0.00 – 0.99

How will my student be assessed?

Your student's learning will be assessed using a variety of summative assessments. These tools will include formal assessments such as traditional paper-and-pencil tests, projects, written papers, lab reports, or verbal assessments, but they may also include informal assessments such as classroom discussions or teacher observations. Essentially, every time a student demonstrates his/her level of understanding in a standards-based class he/she provides the teacher with evidence of learning.

Why does my student have an "I" instead of an A-F letter grade?

"I" Stands for "incomplete." This score is used by a teacher when the student has not provided enough evidence for the teacher to assess the proficiency level on a given standard. This typically happens when the assignment/assessment the teacher used to measure proficiency was not completed by the student. Instead of entering a zero in the gradebook, which would communicate the student is not proficient on the standard, the teacher will enter an "incomplete" to communicate that not enough evidence has been provided to measure an accurate proficiency level for the standard.

Why does my student have a passing percentage grade but a failing letter grade or incomplete?

All standards-based classes require a student to be assessed on at least 80% of their reported standards that have been covered at that point in the class. If a student does not meet this requirement at any time, the student's letter grade will drop to incomplete until they have been assessed on the missing standards.

If you see this situation in your student's grade, please be proactive by working with your student and their teacher to get your student assessed on the necessary standards as soon as possible.

NOTE: If the student has not met the 80% requirement at the end of the semester, the student will receive an "incomplete" for two weeks in order to provide additional time to complete at least 80% of the assessments. At the end of the two weeks, a failing grade will be issued regardless of the performance on the other standards.

Why don't we have marking periods anymore?

Marking periods are now treated as "progress reports" in order to allow for standards to be covered over a semester rather than a 9-week marking period. Previously, a semester grade was calculated on 40-40-20 system, meaning each marking period counted as 40% of the semester grade and the semester exam counted as 20% of the semester grade (MP1 40% + MP2 40% + Sem Exam 20% = 100%).

Since we do not want to cut a standard off in the middle of a semester when we expect a student to improve on his or her learning throughout the entire semester, we have changed the format to eliminate marking periods and only consider semesters as official reporting cutoffs. This means that the semester grade will now be calculated on an 80-20 system (Sem Grade 80% + Sem Exam 20% = 100%). Grades will no longer reset like they did at the marking period; instead, they will continue on throughout the semester until the end of the semester. Progress reports will be sent home in place of report cards at the "marking period" cutoffs.

Middle School students do not take exams so their grades will be based entirely off of the semester grade.

What can my student do to raise their grade in a standards-based class?

The goal in a standards-based class is ensuring that students master the essential standards for the class, so any efforts to raise your student's grade will have the same goal. Your student should meet with the teacher to determine which standards need improvement and arrange a reassessment agreement to create a plan on how to relearn the material and when to be reassessed. If your student demonstrates a higher level of mastery on the assessment, then the grade for that standard will be increased and your student's grade will increase. Again, the focus is on improving your student's mastery of the material, so extra credit points are not used in standards-based classes.

What does my student need to do in order to be reassessed?

Students will have the opportunity to redo/retake any assignment or assessment. A redo/retake can be requested by a student and/or assigned by a teacher. All retakes must require intervention, as determined by the teacher, prior to the retake and must not be the original assessment. See our retake grading policy in the student handbook on page 11.

Why should my student do the homework assigned in class if it isn't included in the grade?

Many students feel that in a standards-based class they don't have to worry about anything except their final chapter or unit test. This is incorrect. It is important for students to understand that they are being assessed every day by their teachers and that everything they do in class lets their teacher assess their knowledge and helps prepare the students for the assessments. Just as an NFL team would never expect to win the Super Bowl without hours upon hours of practicing, students need the practice that homework provides to prepare them for success.

Student work is also analyzed by teachers to determine growth and improvement towards mastery of a specific skill or content. So, if a student chooses to not do an assignment, not only are they missing an opportunity to practice a skill, they also miss an opportunity to display mastery of a standard to their teacher.

Why doesn't my student have a grade yet?

Because standards-based grading focuses on assessments, your student's overall class grade may not be updated as frequently as it was when every assignment impacted the grade. This shift is especially noticeable at the beginning of the semester when it may take a few weeks for the class to complete the first assessment and for your student to be given a grade. Please contact your student's teacher at any time if you have questions about your student's grade.

Why do some classes look different in Powerschool than others?

Since this is our “pilot” year in the new system, some teachers have different ways of entering scores into the grade book. Some teachers only enter standards scores which means you will have to click on the standard to view the score in Powerschool. Other teachers enter each score as total points which shows up as a regular score like you are used to seeing in Powerschool. Both methods are using the standards-based approach; it is simply the method of score entry that is different.

Are non-academic factors, such as effort, attitude, participation, and behavior part of the class grade?

These factors have always been and will continue to be an important part of your student’s success. However, in standards-based grading, these factors will be communicated separately from your student’s academic grade.

How will standards-based grading affect my student’s GPA and transcript?

Standards-based grading reports an overall letter grade for each course, so it does not have any impact on your student’s grade point average or transcript. All grades will still be converted to letter grades and compute into a GPA.

If we change school districts, how will my student’s grade be transferred if the new district does not use standards-based grading?

When a student transfers to a new district, the transfer grade is determined by the student’s current letter grade. For example, if the student currently has an average of 3.00 on the standards-based scale, the current letter grade is a B, so the transfer grade is sent as a B/85%. The River Valley student services office sends the grade scale conversion chart shown above to allow the receiving district to determine the appropriate grade in their grading system. The receiving school is also sent some basic information about standards-based grading to help with the transition.

How can I get more information about my student’s grade or about standards-based grading?

If you have questions or concerns about your student’s grade in a class or if you would like more information on standards-based grading, please contact the teacher of that class for more information or contact the building Principal.

