

A CLOSER LOOK AT STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IN OSSEO AREA SCHOOLS: WHAT PARENTS AND STUDENTS CAN EXPECT TO SEE THIS YEAR

This year, teachers in ISD 279-Osseo Area Schools will begin a three-year implementation plan for a Standards-Based Grading system. Standards-Based Grading helps ensure that student grades are meaningful, accurate, consistent, and supportive of learning because grades are based on clearly defined concepts or skills students are expected to learn. The seven benchmarks below are the areas of focus for the 2011-2012 school year. Parents and students will notice that these benchmarks are being incorporated into student report cards this year.

Grades are directly tied to specific concepts or skills that students are expected to learn in each course or grade level.

In standards-based grading systems, grades are tied to the specific concepts or skills (called “standards”) taught in the class or at that grade level. Assignments are also linked to specific concepts or skills. Non-academic factors such as attendance, extra credit, behavior, and late work, among others, are not included in a grade.

Grades will show what students have learned compared to the standard rather than compared to the performance of classmates.

In short, this means teachers won’t grade on a curve. The point of reference is the grade-level or course standard (the specific concept or skill) – not other students. In a standards-based system, students with the same skill level should receive the same grade, regardless of which school they attend or who else is in their class.

Students will continue to collaborate with others on academic work, but grades will be based on each student’s individual achievement.

Collaboration is a critical skill for tomorrow’s workforce, so teachers will continue to encourage it. The grades individual students earn, however, will be based on what they know and can do as individuals, not on what their group knows and does.

A minimum of 80% of the term grade will be based on assessments that show what students learned following instruction. The remaining part of the grade (up to 20%) may include work done as students are practicing the specific concept or skill.

The majority of the grade will be based on what the student has actually learned at the end of instruction. Teachers may use a variety of “summative” (or summary) assessments; a summative assessment might be a paper and pencil test, but it could also be a project, presentation, quiz, or something else that gives students a chance to show what they learned following instruction. The key is that kids have had a chance to learn, practice, and then practice some more before completing the summative assessment. Another way of thinking about

summative assessment is as a measure of academic achievement. Because these assessments are completed after a student has had the opportunity to learn, they are the great majority of a grade.

“Formative” (or practice) assessment occurs throughout the learning and is used to guide instruction and plan next steps. This work can be homework, practice exercises, in-class work, quizzes, exit slips, quick written or oral responses to a specific question, or a variety of other forms of practice. Because formative assessments are academic practice—done before a student has completed the learning—they represent a smaller part of the grade and will be no more than 20% of the final term grade.

Teachers can override the grading software if they think the calculated grade doesn’t accurately represent what the student actually learned.

If the computer calculations (typically averages) result in a grade that doesn’t match what a teacher knows about the student’s attainment of the learning standards, the teacher can (and should) adjust the grade to make it more accurate.

Students will have multiple opportunities and multiple ways (within reasonable time limitations) to show what they have learned.

To ensure that teachers have enough evidence to determine an accurate grade, students will have multiple opportunities and multiple ways to demonstrate what they have learned. They may have several practice activities that assess their progress on each standard, followed by a summary assessment that measures their achievement on a specific standard. Summary assessments could take the form of a quiz, an essay, a problem set, or a test. Some teachers will offer retakes to provide students with multiple chances to show what they know; retakes are not, however, required.

Teachers will ensure that students understand in advance how their grades will be determined.

Teachers will thoroughly explain their grading system so students understand the marks they receive and are not surprised by their grade at the end of the term.