

Iron County School District
Standards Based Grading
Q & A Document for Parents

WHAT IS STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

- **What is standards-based grading?**

Standards-Based Grading is simply reporting performance on each learning target or skill. In our district, this will include academic standards, concepts, and practices from the Utah core, as well as the Iron County essential skills and dispositions defined below by our community (Iron's Essential Eight Skills and Dispositions). Each standard or skill will be measured on a scale from one to four as defined by proficiency scales written by teacher teams. In these proficiency scales, which will be publically visible, the four levels of **developing** (score 1), **approaching** (score 2), **proficient** (score 3) and **mastery** (score 4) are defined so that the success criteria for each level is clear to teachers, parents, and students. A student's letter grade in secondary schools will be determined based upon the percentage of these standards that students meet or exceed as described below (Grade Determination and Reporting)

WHY

- **Why are we moving in this direction?**

Grading and reporting learning by standard allows students, teachers, and parents to focus on the learning of specific curricular and essential skills rather than the chasing of points, or simply completing missing work to raise an average grade. Grades have traditionally been a representation of several components, including, but not limited to, the number of assignments completed, tests, and quizzes, extra credit, etc. They are also represented as an average over time rather than a demonstration of where they are currently, their most recent level of understanding. This type of grading and reporting falls short for both students and parents if they are concerned with exactly what a student knows and may not know so students can be prepared for the demands of college and careers. It emphasizes completion of assignments and point gathering over competency in content and essential skills. Traditionally, students are held back by previous failures or low scores and without clear next steps or hope for overcoming these mistakes, will often give up. By contrast, explicit expectations of student proficiency, opportunities to reassess, and recognizing their progress in specific criteria promotes the feeling of clarity and confidence, motivating students to achieve at high levels.

The move toward standards-based grading is research-based and modeled after the work of Robert J. Marzano, Richard DuFour, Tom Schimmer, Phil Warrick, et al. The initial research is based on item response theory vs classical test theory, with the former having stronger findings, primarily in the area of classification of errors. Iron County School District has been involved with the PLC process for several years and uses the High-Reliability Schools model as a guiding framework for school improvement and strategic planning. Standards-based grading is built on the foundation of safe and collaborative cultures, highly-effective teaching, and guaranteed and viable curriculum in that model.

IRON'S ESSENTIAL EIGHT SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS

- **How were the essential eight determined?**

A survey of nearly 1000 members of our community including business leaders, post-secondary educators, parents, students and K-12 educators were asked, "What skills are essential for the future success of our graduates?" The top responses included critical thinking and problem solving, responsibility, communication, creativity, collaboration, resilience, growth mindset, and financial literacy. Our district strategic planning team opted to use this input and include these eight skills as elements in our K-12 courses.

- **Aren't these subjective? How will teachers accurately assess and report these skills?**

Each of our essential skills and dispositions have objective success criteria laid out in a proficiency scale created by our district committees of teachers who referenced expert literature and SUU's essential learning outcome rubrics. Subjective determinations of proficiency in these areas is not appropriate. Teachers are encouraged to assess these eight by using the proficiency scales within their curriculum and activities they already do in their classes. For example, when students present their projects they could be assessed on communication and creativity, in addition to the academic standards, based upon the criteria listed in the grade appropriate proficiency scale. These skills should be measured somewhat frequently and through multiple means of evidence if they are included as part of a students grade report so students can act on the feedback to improve and parents are not caught off guard by the results at the end of the term.

- **Why are these essential eight skills and dispositions a part of student's grades?**

The students we are educating today and into the future will be preparing for jobs that may not even exist today? Information at all levels is literally at their fingertips. When we consider adequate preparation for the future, we must consider skills that are transferable and consider them as important to teach as our content. If that is the case, then we also report the learning of these skills in the same way as we report learning on our content. Many of the essential eight skills are, in themselves, content related, such as critical thinking communication, collaboration, creativity, and financial literacy. Skills such as responsibility, resilience, and growth mindset are dispositions that many consider not only essential life skills, but also important to the learning of content within the classroom. When we value and report on those skills they become important to students, teachers and parents, and will in fact support the learning of the content. Students that master the content easily, may benefit from the development of these dispositions where they wouldn't bother otherwise. If these skills were not valued in the grade, students may opt not to do homework, pass in assignments late, give up easily, give only minimal effort instead of best work and other acts of irresponsibility in their studies. Students that struggle with the content, but have developed the dispositions of responsibility, resilience, and growth mindset may benefit from a grade report that includes these, rather than one that only values content.

DISTRICT GUARANTEED AND VIABLE CURRICULUM

- **What is common school to school and what is left for schools and teams to decide?**

When students move from school to school there are a small set of standards that are common district wide along with their corresponding proficiency scales to ensure teachers reference the same criteria for scoring. Teachers and schools have autonomy to add standards beyond these and write the related proficiency scales.

GRADE DETERMINATION AND REPORTING

- **How do we translate a 1,2,3,4 into letter grades? How are GPA/Grades determined and reported?**

Grades are determined directly from the percentage of standards that have been met or have exceeded expectations (**proficient** (3) or **mastery** (4)). For example, if eight of the ten standards have been met, the percentage shown is 80%, which is a (B⁻). This focuses students on achieving the expected learning and skills, and moves beyond just the individual assignment scores that have traditionally made up a grade.

GPA will be determined as it has been traditionally, based on the letter grades entered in all classes. It is the letter grade that will be determined differently than before, now based on standards met or exceeded. This process will be uniform in all classes so that parents can more easily advocate for and guide their student's learning and achievement. Everything else will stay the same so as not to impact the college entrance process.

See the outline below to compare and contrast the two grading systems.

Traditional Grading

% Assignment Scores/Points/Average ---> Letter Grade ---> Transcript---> GPA ---> College Acceptance

Standards Based Grading

% of Standards Met or Exceeded ---> Letter Grade ---> Transcript---> GPA ---> College Acceptance

- **Where will parents find this new style of grade report for their students?**

A report from each of your student's classes will be available on Mastery Connect. You will be invited to create an account via email at masteryconnect.com. Once logged in, you will select a class where you will find a list of each of the standards and skills they are being measured on with an indication of both the score (1,2,3,4) and the associated color (red, yellow, green, blue). When you click to expand each standard you will see the proficiency scale and success criteria for each level as well as the assessments they have been given in that standard overtime. You will also see a percentage in the top right hand corner that indicates what percentage of standards they have met or exceeded. This percentage will be translated into their final letter grade, using the familiar letter grade scale, at the endS of the term for secondary students only. This report to parents from Mastery Connect, based on standards, should be updated frequently by teachers so parents are aware of student performance throughout the term.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND INTERVENTIONS

- **What about our students with IEPs?**

Students with IEP accommodations should be given grade level instruction and held to the same standard as others unless otherwise indicated in their IEP's standard-aligned goals. If a student with an IEP has accommodations, a teacher should make sure that all IEP accommodations are occurring within the structure of the class. If these accommodations are insufficient, general education teachers will work with special education teachers on interventions. Students with an IEP may have modifications to their curriculum and expected level proficiency. If this is the case they should be measured based on these modifications.