Standards-Based Grading:
A Report to the Superintendent and School Board
of McLean County Unit District #5

Prepared by Members* of the Citizen’s Advisory Council,
Subcommittee on Standards-Based Grading

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Forward

One of the four research topics offered to members of the Unit 5 Citizen’s Advisory Council (CAC) for the 2013-2014 academic year focuses on standards-based grading and whether it is a feasible option for implementation in Unit 5. This document was prepared by the CAC subcommittee on standards-based grading in an effort to educate ourselves, the Superintendent, and the School Board on the topic so we can provide a cogent response to the question of implementation in Unit 5.

The goals of this report are simple: present facts about standards-based grading and provide a summary recommendation that incorporates the diverse views of our workgroup members. The process was also simple: develop a list of questions whose answers would provide broad coverage of the topic; assign one question to each subcommittee member to research and prepare a written summary that answers the questions. The answers to the set of generated questions compose the bulk of this document. A Bibliography, with references and citations on sources of information consulted to answer each question, is at the back of this document.

Although we researched eleven questions to inform our final recommendation, the answers are not mutually exclusive. There is overlap between the summaries, which assured us that as a group we had provided a thorough treatment of the topic. It is our hope that this document will provide helpful input to the Unit 5 administration as they consider the implementation of standards-based grading.

Subcommittee on Standards-Based Grading
Executive Summary

**What is standards-based grading?** Standards-based grading is an assessment and feedback method which involves measuring students’ proficiency on well-defined course objectives (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Unlike a traditional grading system, which uses individual assessments (tests, quizzes, etc.) to organize judgments of achievement in a given course, the standards-based method uses a set of learning goals and performance standards. These goals and standards (or just standards) are criterion- or proficiency-based and precisely define what a student is expected to know or be able to do. A standards-based system does not focus on percent of points like the traditional system, but on mastery of standards, with grades intended to reflect one’s level of mastery. In order to discern a student’s level of mastery of a standard, a *grading rubric* is applied.

A standards-based system distinguishes between two purposes for assessment: formative and summative. *Formative assessment* is considered part of the instructional process. It is used to support ongoing growth and improvement by providing practice and reflects student progress toward mastery of learning goals. *Summative assessment* is assessment of learning. It provides information used for making judgments about student achievement at the end of a period of instruction.

Unlike in a traditional system, class grades in a standards-based system are based on achievement only and do not include measures of behavior. The day-to-day implementation of a standards-based grading system makes heavy use of formative assessment. Over time, multiple observations are gathered of a student’s performance on any given standard, and a pattern emerges to show how well the student has progressed. Summative assessment is used less often, and only at the end of instruction. Some school districts using a standards-based system allow students to provide revisions to their work or retake summative assignments and tests until they meet or master a standard. Thus, report card grades in a standards-based system emphasize the most recent evidence of learning. Although many districts adopt standards-based grading *in addition* to traditional grades, standards-based grading can *replace* traditional point-based grades.

A major benefit of a standards-based grading system is that it aligns all parts of the curriculum to the course goals, thus keeping the goals in focus. It also gives students specific, actionable feedback on their strengths and weaknesses relative to those goals, thus increasing student ownership of their own learning.

One area where standards-based grading is in need of more details concerns the adaptation of the system to appropriately serve students with special education, gifted/talented, or English language needs.
How effective is standards-based grading? Research on standards-based grading shows overwhelmingly that students learn their subjects and perform better when instruction and assessment are implemented in a standards-based fashion (Hanover Research, 2011; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; O’Connor, 2007). After implementing standards-based grading, a study completed by Quakertown Community School District found that there was a strong positive correlation between proficiency levels and grades on report cards for reading and math. Furthermore, they concluded that SAT and ACT scores were higher than they’ve ever been in most areas and that increased student achievement correlated with the implementation of standards-based grading.

Implementation of standards-based grading. Standard-based grading has been implemented in a variety of community sizes and among an array of demographics across the United States. For example, Sumner School District in Washington state, Wake County Public School System in Raleigh (North Carolina), Circle Public School District in Towanda, Kansas, and Wood Dale School District #7 in Wood Dale, Illinois have all successfully implemented standards-based grading. Many resources are available to aid in implementation, including parent educational materials, software and training materials for teachers, and the shared experiences of districts who have adopted standards-based grading.

Others districts have either been unable to implement standards-based grading or have had very controversial implementations. One of the most noteworthy examples of a controversial implementation effort is found in the Osseo (Minnesota) school district. Parents, students, and teachers in the Osseo (Minnesota) School District recently continued to rally against already implemented standards-based grading. Teachers’ complaints included insufficient guidance or education provided to them, conflicting information from the district, and the belief that standards-based grading would allow students who would fail under a traditional grading system to pass. Looking within and beyond Osseo, parent complaints about standards-based grading commonly include confusion over grade reports, belief that the system is too subjective, its failure to produce the commonly expected grade point average, and the belief that it does not encourage students to excel.

While a great deal of research demonstrates that parents tend to have a negative response to transitioning to standards-based grading, articles also reflect that most responses are based primarily on “preconceptions, lack of information, or misinformation” (see Meisels, Bickel, Nicholson, and Atkins-Burnett at www.ciera.org/library/archive/2001-2006/200106.htm). Even with information available to families, making the transition from letter grades to standards-based grading introduces questions from teachers, parents and students that each district moving in this direction should be prepared to address.
**Higher education and standards-based grading.** The question of how college admissions offices look at standards-based grading reports is a deciding factor for high schools contemplating standards-based grading. Several reports have verified that most colleges already acknowledge the vast discrepancies between high school grading policies and transcripts (for example, see New England Secondary School Consortium Resolutions of Support at [http://newenglandssc.org/resources/resolutions](http://newenglandssc.org/resources/resolutions)). Colleges have entrance policies in place that try to take into account more than just the transcript in an effort to see the “whole person” and decide if the student is a “good fit” for their school. Furthermore, demonstrating achievement of common core standards is usually “seen as a strong indicator of college/career success...” (see [http://www.qcsd.org/Page/8180](http://www.qcsd.org/Page/8180)). A report from the Hanover Research Council states that “Generally, admissions offices treat all grades as welcome indicators of high school performance while implicitly acknowledging that every school has a unique perspective, student body, and system.” None of the college admissions offices contacted in their study expressed a concern or a negative view of a transcript based on standards-based grading. This research included feedback from top-ranked institutions.

Standards-based grading is being used independently by professors in higher education in the United States and abroad, but there is no broadly-held vision for deploying it across an entire university or country.

**Unit 5 and standards-based grading.** There are currently several teams who have implemented standards-based grading in their Unit 5 classrooms. One is a sixth-grade team at Parkside Junior High School comprised of two teachers and approximately 50 students. These teachers made the change to standards-based grading about 5 years ago after hearing Rick Wormeli, an expert on standards-based grading, speak at a conference. They decided to adopt his philosophies as best practices for educating students. Challenges for Unit 5 in adopting standards-based grading across an entire grade level would require that teachers not only agree on what each number on the grading rubric means for every learning standard, but also that teachers agree on HOW to assess students. Specific examples cited include consistency in assessing only the work (not behavior) and determining how the quality of work relates to mastery of the standard. The teachers currently using standards-based grading in the classroom are confident that it can be effective and viable when other Unit 5 teachers are introduced to its benefits and given the same development and educational tools they have received.

An informal survey of parents and teachers conducted both inside and outside of Unit 5 yielded results with a familiar refrain. Many parents were reluctant to support standards-based grading, saying that it was too confusing. They would like consistency and to keep traditional
grading if their students would be graded using the traditional system in the upper grade levels. Teachers seemed to like standards-based grading as they believed it made it easier to grade a large number of students in an unbiased manner.

**Summary and recommendations.** It is clear there is much dissension and controversy surrounding standards-based grading – for every comment in support of standards-based grading, there is another vociferously against it. Much of the negativity surrounding standards-based grading can be traced to misperception, lack of support for teachers and parents, botched implementations, reluctance to change, and fear – parents’ fear that standards-based grading will undermine their children’s education, that individual needs will not be met adequately (especially at the extremes of ability), and that standards-based grading is just another passing educational fad. It is interesting to note that all of these barriers – with the exception of reluctance to change – can be largely influenced by the school district through the approach they use to implement.

We recommend that Unit 5 seriously consider implementing standards-based grading across all grade levels, but only if its implementation is well planned, expertly executed, and largely supported by those who will be affected by it. It is expected that there will be some parent resistance, and the manner in which the district addresses that resistance will result in either gaining further supporters or alienating parents. It is natural that parents will have questions and concerns, and all need to be addressed seriously, sensibly, and with respect. The smoothest implementations happen when the change is supported by the stakeholders – when there is “buy in”. Getting parents, teachers, students, and the community at-large on board with a change of this magnitude will require some marketing, especially around the benefits of the system.

To that end, if the district decides to implement the system, we suggest the following:

- Create a well-articulated timeline of the entire process;
- Pilot test the use of the system in several classrooms at different levels for a school year. Provide training and support to teachers who volunteer (teachers who will later become peer educators and supporters).
- Evaluate the pilot implementation to identify and address any problems that arise along the way and to provide an overall assessment on the success of the implementation.
- Expand the implementation to one or two educational levels (i.e., elementary, junior high, senior high) over two or more years.
- Parent education - develop parent educational materials on standards-based grading, including PowerPoint presentations available on-line, clearly articulated brochures on-line and sent home on paper. All materials should be available in the major languages used among the school districts’ families. Parent nights at the schools could provide educational time and an opportunity for parents to have their questions answered.
• Student education - hold classroom- or school-level presentations and discussions and provide printed or on-line materials for students appropriate to their developmental level.

• Community education – hold a series of community forum nights where community members can be educated, provide comments, and have their questions answered. Provide written documentation of the implementation process in the form of newspaper articles.

• Teacher education and support – provide teachers with high quality training on how to implement standards-based grading. Research, select, and provide the software system necessary to implement standards-based grading in the most efficient way possible, and assure that there will be sufficient MIS staff to troubleshoot problems. Identify a team of designated staff who can provide support and/or each mentor a small group of teachers.

• Input from stakeholders – Consider putting together a team of parents, teachers, community members, and district staff to serve as an advisory board for the implementation.

• Make sure the system is implemented consistently across grades and classrooms.

• Evaluate the implementation, perhaps using on-line surveys to track stakeholder opinions toward the implementation process over time.
What is standards-based grading?
Janet Titus Boudreaux

Standards-based grading is an assessment and feedback method which involves measuring students’ proficiency on well-defined course objectives (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). As a philosophy, standards-based grading uses the grade book to communicate students’ strengths and weaknesses relative to the big ideas – or standards – of a course.

**Traditional grading system.** One way to describe standards-based grading is to contrast it with a traditional grading system. In the traditional system, grades are based on a variety of assessments (homework, quizzes, tests, projects, etc.) of the class material. Each assessment results in a grade – typically based on a 100-point system - that intends to reflect how well the student has learned the class content. In addition, behaviors reflecting learning habits – such as effort, participation, attendance, conduct, and timeliness of work – may also be assessed, and opportunities to earn extra credit to offset a low grade on class work may be offered. A student’s quarterly, semester, or final grade in a class is mathematically computed based on a weighted average of all grades earned on class work and behavioral assessments across the grading period. The final weighted percentage of points is converted to the familiar A-B-C-D-F letter grade. The main advantages of this method are simplicity and professional freedom. However, it results in a very limited measure of a student’s abilities.

**Standards-based grading system.** Rather than using individual assessments (tests, quizzes, etc.) to organize judgments of achievement in a given course, the standards-based method uses a set of learning goals and performance standards. These goals and standards (or just standards) are criterion- or proficiency-based and precisely define what a student is expected to know or be able to do. Each course activity in the standards-based system – each homework assignment, quiz, project, etc. – maps onto a set of specific standards. Below are examples of learning standards.

Two standards from 1st grade math in Unit 5:
- “Compares numbers using greater than, less than, equal to”.
- “Demonstrates an understanding of patterns to solve a number grid puzzle”.

A common core standard for 7th grade mathematics (number system):
- “Understand subtraction of rational numbers as adding the additive inverse, \( p - q = p + (-q) \); Show that the distance between two rational numbers on the number line is the absolute value of their difference, and apply this principle in real-world contexts”.

A standards-based system does not focus on percent of points like the traditional system, but on mastery of standards, with grades intended to reflect one’s level of mastery. In order to
discern a student’s level of mastery of a standard, a grading rubric is applied. Below are several examples of grading rubrics:

- In Unit 5, kindergarten through 2nd grade students’ report cards have used the following rubric for at least the past 10 years:
  - How often a student demonstrates mastery of individual standards in each learning domain (reading, math, etc.) is assessed with a “+” for consistent demonstration, “/” for sometimes, and “-” for seldom.
  - Overall level of mastery in each learning domain is indicated with a “3” for mastery, “2” for developing, and “1” for needs support.

- In this 4-level rubric from the Elk Grove Unified School District in California, specific behavioral examples are used to illustrate level of mastery for a Common Core State Standard (CCSS) for 4th grade writing on “Opinion/Argument”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus/Opinion CCSS 1a, 1b, 4</th>
<th>4 - above grade level</th>
<th>3 - at grade level</th>
<th>2 - approaching grade level</th>
<th>1 - below grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responds skillfully to all parts of the prompt</td>
<td>Responds to all parts of the prompt</td>
<td>Responds to most parts of the prompt</td>
<td>Responds to some or no parts of the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>States an opinion that demonstrates insightful understanding of topic/text</td>
<td>States an opinion that demonstrates an understanding of topic/text</td>
<td>States an opinion that demonstrates limited understanding of topic/text</td>
<td>Does not state an opinion and/or demonstrates little to no understanding of topic/text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- This 5-level grading rubric provides general descriptions of the quality of performance expected at each level:
  - 5 = MASTERY = Above standard, exceptional understanding/skill level
  - 4 = PROFICIENT = At standard, solid understanding/skill level
  - 3 = APPROACHING = Close to standard but not quite there; progressing
  - 2 = DEVELOPING = Below standard, partial understanding/skill level
  - 1 = BEGINNING = Far below standard, minimal understanding/skill level

A standards-based system distinguishes between two purposes for assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessment is considered part of the instructional process. It is used to support ongoing growth and improvement by providing practice and reflects student progress toward mastery of learning goals. Assessments with a formative purpose include quizzes, initial drafts, homework, and questioning during instruction. Although teachers provide feedback on students’ formative assessments, these evaluations do not count toward students’ overall class grades. Formative assessment also provides teachers with information they can use to adjust their teaching while students are learning. For example, by observing the pattern of formative
assessment scores, the teacher can tailor his/her teaching for individual students or for a whole class.

**Summative assessment** is assessment of learning. It provides information used for making judgments about student achievement at the end of a period of instruction. Assessments with a summative purpose include final projects or performances, unit or chapter tests, quarterly or semester exams, state assessments, district benchmark or interim assessments, and scores that are used for accountability for schools and students (report cards). Summative assessments at the classroom level provide measurable evidence of learning that has taken place, so they are counted toward class grades. Rather than providing information to make instructional adjustments and interventions during the learning process, summative assessments are used to evaluate achievement, effectiveness of programs, school improvement goals, alignment of curriculum, or student placement in specific programs.

Unlike in a traditional system, class grades in a standards-based system are based on achievement only and do not include measures of behavior. If behavior is assessed, it is reported separately from achievement. For example, in the Unit 5 kindergarten through 2nd grade example, “learning characteristics” are assessed separately by indicating how often the student demonstrates each of a collection of characteristics using “+” for consistent demonstration, “/” for sometimes, and “-” for seldom.

The day-to-day implementation of a standards-based grading system makes heavy use of formative assessment. Over time, multiple observations are gathered of a student’s performance on any given standard, and a pattern emerges to show how well the student has progressed. Summative assessment is used less often, and only at the end of instruction. Some school districts using a standards-based system allow students to provide revisions to their work or retake summative assignments and tests until they meet or master a standard. Thus, report card grades in a standards-based system emphasize the most recent evidence of learning. Although many districts adopt standards-based grading in addition to traditional grades, standards-based grading can replace traditional point-based grades.

A major benefit of a standards-based grading system is that it aligns all parts of the curriculum to the course goals, thus keeping the goals in focus. It also gives students specific, actionable feedback on their strengths and weaknesses relative to those goals, thus increasing student ownership of their own learning.
What does research say about the effectiveness of standards-based grading?

Cheri Carroll

Educational reform in the United States since the 1980s has been largely driven by the setting of academic standards for what students should know and be able to do. These standards can then be used to guide all other system components. The Standards-Based Grading reform movement calls for clear, measurable standards for all school students. Rather than norm-referenced rankings, a standards-based system measures each student against the concrete standard. Curriculum, assessments, and professional development are aligned to the standards. Many states enacted education reform legislation in the early 1990s.

Standards-based education reform in the United States began with the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983. Then, in 1989, an education summit involving all fifty state governors and President George H. W. Bush resulted in the adoption of national education goals for the year 2000, which included content standards. A standards-based vision was enacted under the Clinton Administration in 1994. A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed to ensure that all states had rigorous standards for all subject areas and grade levels. By 1996, a National Education Summit included 44 governors and 50 corporate CEOs who set forth priorities such as high academic standards, tests that are more vigorous to measure whether standards are being met, and accountability systems. By 1998, almost every state had implemented, or was in the process of implementing, academic standards for their students in math and reading. This vision was then carried forward by the Bush Administration in 2001 with the passing of No Child Left Behind.

The vision of standards-based grading reform is that every teenager will receive a meaningful high school diploma that serves essentially as a public guarantee that they can read, write, and do basic math at a level that might be useful to an employer. In order to avoid failure at the end of high school, the standards would extend to the lower grades and make use of regular assessments.

Standards are based on what students will need to know to be competitive in the job market, not what textbook publishers or tradition say. Thus, the standards focus on the goal of a literate and economically competitive workforce. The standards outline what students need to know, understand, and be able to do in a way that is relevant to future education and employment needs. Both excellence and equity are valued. Standards are written so that all students are capable of achieving them and so that talented students can exceed them. It is acknowledged that both advanced and struggling students can learn in their own way and at their own rate.

Some aspects of standards-based grading have been criticized. Some educational researchers such as UCLA's Gary Orfield disagree that all students should pass a rigorous test just to get a high school diploma. Others, such as staff of Mathematically Correct, have questioned the
standards approach to teaching mathematics. Some state standards have been criticized for either not being specific as to academic content or not implementing curricula which follow the new standards. Also, advocates of traditional education believe it is not realistic to expect all students to perform at the same level as the best students or to punish students simply because they do not perform as well as the most academically talented students. Teachers state that there are some concerns, such as some students do not like the revisions they are required to do. Furthermore, some struggle to overcome test anxiety and need access to alternate assessments.

However, research on standards-based grading shows overwhelmingly that students learn their subjects and perform better when instruction and assessment are implemented in a standards-based fashion. The literature is full of case examples that indicate that standards-based grading is helpful. For example, a math teacher at Montrose High School in Colorado reports that she improved her curriculum and found new ways to use assessments and intervention strategies under the standards-based system. She reports that she is also able to work with parents more effectively by giving them better information about their children’s progress. She reports that parents like that this method of grading is similar to that in a workplace environment. She also reports that many students express liking that they have a larger degree of control over their grades.

After implementing standards-based grading, a study completed by Quakertown Community School District found that there was a strong positive correlation between proficiency levels and grades on report cards for reading and math. Furthermore, they concluded that SAT and ACT scores are higher than they've ever been in most areas, which would indicate that increased student achievement correlates with the implementation of standards-based grading. They also reported that they are seeing more of their students get into highly competitive universities on the strength of their standards-based transcripts.

Regarding college, the research shows that there is little change in the appearance of the transcript and standards-based grading is not a deterrent to college acceptance. Quakertown Community School District hired a research company to conduct a study of 30 institutions across the country and they found no indication of any adverse implications of standards-based grading for college admissions. According to the report, "Generally, admissions offices treat all grades as welcome indicators of high school performance while implicitly acknowledging that every school has a unique perspective, student body, and system". In addition, report by the Pennsylvania Department of Education states that a higher GPA isn't the key to improving students' chances for college acceptance. Rather, better college entrance exam scores and more rigorous courses are the keys. Thus, by using standards-based grading, we are increasing the chances that students will perform well on entrance exams.

If we base grades on standards instead of attendance, behavior, or extra credit, we can
actually help students understand the idea of quality and walk away with a higher degree of self-sufficiency. Although we can - and should - report information about student performance in areas like attendance and effort, we can report is separately from academic achievement (O'Connor, 2007; Tomilson & McTighe 2006).

Robert J. Marzano is a top standards-based grading expert and researcher who has authored more than 30 books and 150 articles on education topics. He reports that one of the biggest disadvantages to the system is the record keeping for the teachers. However, he also reports that there is now software available that helps make record keeping easier. He believes that the biggest problem with standards-based grading is really just perception - we've used the traditional grading system for about 100 years and everyone is used to A, B, C, D, F. Thus, one important solution would be to educate teachers, students, and parents about standards-based grading. In order to educate parents, resources such as brochures (i.e., Quakertown Community School District), letters (i.e., Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Thornton, CO), glossary-type handouts (that could be distributed at curriculum night), websites (i.e., www.adams12.org/sbg_contact), and videos (that could also be shown at curriculum night) explaining the system would be helpful, as well as parent forums (i.e., Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Thornton, CO).
What does it take to implement a standards-based grading system?

Kevin Hall

Standards-based grading is about showing students what they are good at and what needs improvement. It’s not about providing students with a grade. While this makes sense on the surface and the intent can be understood, society has used grades for so long to show what a student knows. Colleges and universities admit students to their institutions based on traditional grades and insurance companies even provide significant insurance discounts to students based on a GPA measured by the traditional grading scale.

With that said, understanding and communicating what students learned is easier to do in a standards-based grading system. Traditional grading merely provides an average of various homework assignments, quizzes, and exams. The letter grade and average score do not provide an explanation of what was learned and understood. In additions, standards-based grading allows for easy reflection and knowing what works.

Planning to implement standards-based grading can be done by following these steps:

1. Know which standards you are assessing before the unit starts and create the assessment beforehand;
2. Develop multiple strategies to teach the standard;
3. Know how you are going to assess each standard;
4. Be ready to change your strategy as needed.

Using steps 1-3 above, here is an example of a plan for an Algebra I class as it relates to understanding functions:

Step 1: Standards
- Goal One: Knowing that a function has an input and output
- Goal Two: Graphing functions on a coordinate plane

Steps 2 & 3: Strategies/Assessment
- Goal One: Knowing that a function has an input and output
  - **Strategies:** Input and output tables, investment problems
  - **Assessment:** Quiz (input and output tables), investment simulation
- Goal Two: Graphing functions on a coordinate plane
  - **Strategies:** Plotting points and graphing on graph paper, graphing calculator activity
  - **Assessment:** Quiz (plotting points), drawing calculator functions

As a standards-based grading system is implemented, it is important to use several different assessments of standards to document in the grade book. This provides a more complete picture of students’ understanding. An approach that came to the forefront during my research was known as the “The Power of Five”. This refers to assessing each standard five times in order to
have five estimates to put into the grade book. “The Power of Five” gives students multiple opportunities to perfect a standard and allows the teacher to see a student’s growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Activity: Flash card association poster</th>
<th>In-class crossword puzzle</th>
<th>Quiz 1 Goal 1: Meaning of word</th>
<th>In-class: Frayer Model</th>
<th>Civil War Test – Goal 1: Meaning of word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below are some “best practices” used in the standards-based grading system followed by their rationales:

- **Grading Weights**
  - At least 70% of your grades should go towards assignments that assess learning.
  - Sample Grading Scale
    - Assessments – 35%
    - Projects/Activities – 40%
    - Unit Activities – 15%
    - Participation – 10%

- **Re-taking/Re-assessing**
  - Re-take = Allowing students to make corrections on their mistakes.
    - Set a Max/Min Retake Score
      - Example: 70%
  - Re-assessing = Giving a different assessment on the standard.
    - Set a Mastery Level
      - Example: 80%

- **Grading Homework vs. Checking Homework**
  - Grading individual homework assignments doesn’t fit into standard-based grading unless the homework is being used as an assessment.
    - **Rationale**: Because homework assignments are such a small portion of the grade, they are put into a grade book.
    - **Pros**: Students will see the grades in the grade book.
    - **Cons**: 1) A lot of grading; 2) Cannot verify if the student did the work on their own; 3) Student may not do the assignment and the missing grade becomes missed “data” towards assessing the standard.
  - Checking Homework
    - **Rationale**: Checking as to see if the students are doing the homework allows you to assess students’ effort towards their grade.
Pros: 1) Eliminates “grading” homework assignments; 2) Places the learning on the student; 3) Students completing homework on their own becomes less important; 4) Allows for missing assignments.

Cons: 1) Have to be more deliberate on showing students the benefits of doing homework.

Grading Scale

- Standard-based grading is more about the level of mastery than the actual grade. The grade should reflect the level of mastery. Some systems mix standards-based grading with a traditional grading approach.
  - A – Highly Proficient – (100–90)
  - B – Proficient – (89-80)
  - C – Emerging – (79-70)
  - D – Deficient – (69-60)
  - F – Does not meet standard – (59-50)
  - ** Lowest Grade 50%**
What are some examples of communities across the country using standards-based grading in their schools?

Katie Welter

Standard-based grading (SBG) has been implemented in a variety of community sizes and among an array of demographics across the United States. The intention of the transition from letter-based grades is to more accurately reflect true student learning and growth. “SBG is a way to clarify what a grade means. It separates assignments designed to help students practice their learning from assignments designed to assess a student’s level of mastery. Additionally, the focus of SBG is solely on proficiency and mastery of the content” (1). In the communities in which SBG has been enacted, parents and teachers stated in multiple resources that they did so in an attempt to better address behavioral aspects separate from grading, create specific learning targets for students, and adopt evidence-based formulas for learning (2). Adopting the SBG method is not unique to one area or stereotyped community. School districts from both coasts are participating in these efforts, as well as a variety of Midwestern and other inland areas.

Sumner School District in Washington state encompasses Auburn, Federal Way, Franklin Pierce, and Puyallup schools. This district differs from Unit 5 in that they have implemented the SBG system within “all three middle schools, at all grade levels, and in all classes” for students and parents (6). To help communicate this plan to families, the district has a simple but clear time line posted on the website – as well as a specific Power Point presentation that outlines the reasoning, timeframe, and definitions necessary to help parents better understand and work within the system effectively.

In another attempt to maintain consistency in educating on new programs, Wake County Public School System in Raleigh (North Carolina), Wake Forrest, and the smaller surrounding communities have adopted an online tutorial tool to assist families in their area. The tutorial outlines the goals and intentions of the support the district has for the SBG concept. The tutorial is also set up in an SBG format to assist in clear and consistent communication (7). Circle Public School District in Towanda, Kansas has also implemented a tutorial. However, it is one that parents must electronically sign off on prior to the school year as a part of a demonstrated partnership and understanding of the SBG learning process. The intent is to ensure parental review of the information, provide easy access to common questions, and to hopefully help families embrace the concepts and assist in the promotion of change throughout the district.

Additionally, some districts direct families to additional resources available on the internet that allow students and parents to “practice” with SBG and common core concepts. For example, http://www.internet4classrooms.com/ allows users to “drill down” for activities mapped to standard elements. In particular, the Circle school district provides families with a
comparative tool with the differences and goals of SBG outlined against the previously utilized letter grade system (8).

Looking closer at Illinois schools that have incorporated SBG into their learning programs, districts have reported concerns from families similar to those in other areas implementing SBG. To address concerns from parents involving the implementation phase, Wood Dale School District #7 in Wood Dale, Illinois, has also put together information for families on what they have titled, “A Parent’s Guide to Standards-Based Grading and Reporting” (9). This pamphlet is a hard copy informational brochure that addresses the needs and focuses within specific grades and is unique to certain subjects. It describes the learning targets, standards set, and goals/timeframes for students. Wood Dale has also committed a specific section of their district’s website to providing additional resources for parents looking to obtain more detail. It includes grading practices, extra credit, homework, incompletes, and re-teaching topics so that frequently asked questions can be addressed consistently. While it appears that every school district going through this transition to a new grading system has emphasized the importance of consistency during times of change when initializing SBG, they are also careful to express the benefits that SBG could introduce to the students and learning systems that had previously been in place. The Community Consolidated School District 89 in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, among others, communicated the need to make positive changes to enhance the scholastic experience of the students. In this environment, the grading system was only one portion of the change needing to be made to enhance the district. Having so many changes at once could easily be seen as overwhelming. However, including SBG at this time of change actually worked in the district’s favor, as “everything was in organized chaos, and no one had preconceived notions of what the transition would feel like (10). It was actually seen as a more rational decision to include the SBG concepts with all the other process changes taking place. The Danville School District in Danville, Illinois has adopted SBG for Kindergarten through second grade. To proactively address this, a letter to parents appears on the website for the district. Their district includes their own section of frequently asked questions, resources, as well as a review of the report cards (11). There is also a mention of expanding the grades impacted by SBG to the older grade school levels, as well as to the junior high/middle school ranges, as the results have shown to be beneficial. Like others, these schools have worked to get information out early and in ways that allow for constant review throughout the school year for students/families (11).

While a great deal of research demonstrates that parents have a negative response to transitioning to SBG, articles also reflect that most responses are based primarily on “preconceptions, lack of information, or misinformation” (5). However, when asked what may improve older systems that were not meeting the needs of students, parents outlined details that are all encompassed by a SBG design, which are mostly standardization and the summary report.
of their child’s status (5). In addition to parents, students and teachers have demonstrated initial misconceptions and resistance to change. The Osseo School District, in Hennepin County, Minnesota, encountered their teachers requesting to alter or eliminate SBG in 2013. The board meeting statements from teachers included that there were “more obstacles that are getting in the way of the quality education” than their students deserve (3). However, it appeared that the teachers’ concerns were related more to the lack of preparation for change, rather than to the actual program itself, as additional frustrations were voiced as “haphazard implementation.” “Standards-based grading has been rolled out in a piecemeal fashion without anticipating and addressing potential glitches beforehand,” stated one of the teachers within the school district (3). As a result, the district, like others across the country, has worked hard to demonstrate a commitment to teachers’ perspectives, while still recognizing the benefits that SBG has shown in test scores and student development. Osseo School District remedied the communication issues that were problematic and brought teachers in “at a leadership level so that concerns from the front line could be addressed early and with the right resources” (3). There are no plans to eliminate the SBG system, but the board recognized that “When you make changes to institutional practice, it’s complex and difficult.” (3). The district learned that the largest hurdle for them was not the program, but the actual implementation process.

From a student perspective - at the high school level, one graduating class stated that the SBG system “failed them” (4). This response was the result of a survey provided to the 350-person class. The complaints included the process of remediation, which is one of the concepts of SBG that is intended to enhance growth and learning. According to one of the students, “Remediation, has been the biggest harm…Retakes are easier than the tests and you can rest assured that you will eventually memorize the material if you fail enough times.” In essence, the students do not know how to study for exams, as they accepted failing enough times until taking similar tests forced memorization of the questions or material. However, despite the challenges and complaints, the school board has seen test scores rise on a national level. What they believe is necessary, at this point, is to “develop students’ soft skills, such as preparation and meeting deadlines, and show students how their efforts are more closely linked to their outcomes (4). Within SBG practice, remediation is indicative of a “below-level” understanding of the material being studied and tested. The students at the high school level adapted to the system differently than what some may have predicted, in that they understood what was necessary to pass the courses and tests at a minimal level. Therefore, when the time came to apply material in a higher learning institution, they discovered it was more difficult than previously imagined. Rather than taking responsibility either at the time of learning or for the consequences of their behavior during that period, the students used the SBG as their target when responding in survey format.
With numerous districts at varying levels across the country having adopted SBG, there is a wide array of studies that could potentially predict challenges another school or district would face making a similar change. However, despite many having gone through this previously, unique circumstances are inevitable. Research has demonstrated that even with information available to families, making the transition from letter grades to SBG has introduced questions from teachers, parents and students – that each district moving in this direction should be prepared to address. Initially, the change is challenging – especially as it relates to parents and students understanding how a new grading system can effectively collaborate with the letter grading system still utilized by higher education institutions. Other districts have met initial resistance when parents see a new system as having more subjectivity in grading than less, as it is designed for with SBG. Schools have been able to effectively address this by being proactive and having additional information available for families to refer back to at any time throughout the school year. One of the more challenging questions for the districts to answer on the front end is concern regarding a new grading system that can appear to be solely based upon year-end expectations rather than on progress throughout semesters (12). Additionally, feedback has shown confusion over the interpretation of report cards and understanding the “new language” of a new system (12). This may not only be challenging to families, but to teachers as well. For example, some instructors have struggled with making transitions to a more binary system. However, once this is accomplished, they have discovered that the system truly does allow for more grading objectivity, as there is less room for “point grubbing” (12). Being able to do so has gained student support in the classroom for some, as the children are then able to see the process as one that is more “fair” (12). Additionally, making the transition has made it possible and easier for the students to calculate, track, and understand their own grades since they no longer have to deal with tiered standards and conjunctive systems. Although not all teachers have accepted all caveats of the SBG system, many have discovered that it provides a more objective way for students to be successful and allows them opportunities to provide more detailed and updated feedback (12).
What existing resources are available to implement standards-based grading?
Dawn Wilson

It is vital that the district educate parents and guardians of Unit 5 students on standards-based grading, as there are many sources of information. Many families will rely on friends, social media and what they see in the local news, but that will not be enough. Many parents and guardians are not favorable towards the idea of standards-based grading. Many don’t have a clear understanding of what the common core standards are – let alone standards-based grading - why we are implementing them and what the impact will be on their students. Parents and guardians of special needs and gifted students are concerned more than most.

**Resources for parents and students.** Unit 5 should develop an initiative to educate parents and guardians as well as students. Schools that have already implemented standards-based grading have created a wide array of brochures, parent guides, and Frequently Asked Questions documents. Items such as these should be available in multiple languages on the Web as well as in paper form in school offices. A sample brochure is available at this Web-site: [http://www.adams12.org/files/learning_services/SBG_Brochure.pdf](http://www.adams12.org/files/learning_services/SBG_Brochure.pdf).

Parent nights or a few town hall-type meetings could be held to educate or each school could hold an information night. Information should be consistent and centrally located as well as options offered on who to contact for more information. The Unit 5 web site (not the individual school sites) should be updated with the details around the implementation plans for adopting standards-based grading. Unit 5 currently has curriculum expectations documents for each grade level available online - these documents could be updated to include information related to standards-based grading.

**Training for teachers.** Per a conversation our group had with the Grove Elementary School principal, it appeared the district had plans to visit a school that had already implemented standards-based grading to gather information. Other schools who have implemented are important sources of information, especially as relates to how to train teachers in standards-based grading. The district should provide professional training to teachers on how to implement standards-based grading.

There are numerous software packages available to organize and coordinate implementation of standards-based grading in the classroom. Software resources will be a great time saver given the increased record-keeping that comes with standards-based grading.

**Standards-based grading coalition.** Another important existing resource is found in the district’s teachers, parents, and the school board. A focus group or think tank to guide implementation of standards-based grading may be helpful.
For communities that have chosen not to implement standards-based grading, what were the identified barriers?

Todd Miller

The maintenance of the status quo, for better or for worse, is not as interesting a news story as the implementation of a change, for better or for worse. Finding information on school districts that have discovered barriers to the implementation of standards-based grading systems has been difficult. More readily available are arguments and cautions against standards-based grading.

Having said that, parents, students, and teachers in the Osseo (Minnesota) School District rallied at a board meeting in November 2013 to make heard their position against already implemented standards-based grading. Complaints from students and their families stem from confusion over the meaning of the grades and a sense that the system is not employed uniformly from teacher to teacher (http://pressnews.com/2012/11/08/standards-based-grading-isnt-measuring-up/).

In January 2013, hundreds of teachers from the Osseo School District, in a show of solidarity, attended a board meeting and presented the board with 755 letters signed by teachers seeking change in district policies, including standards-based grading. One teacher complained that standards-based grading was implemented without sufficient guidance or education provided to the teachers. She complained that standards-based grading was rolled out in a piecemeal fashion and that teachers were receiving conflicting information from the District. Another teacher complained that the new standards-based grading system allowed students who would fail under a traditional grading system to pass. This teacher saw an outcome such as this as violating the District’s mission and stated that the practice of passing failing students does not prepare students to be competent (http://maplegrove.patch.com/groups/schools/p/hundreds-teachers-rally-against-standards-based-grading).

One blogger states "A traditional system done in the spirit of standards-based grading is much, much better than a standards-based grading system done poorly." The blogger also sets out 10 ideas for tailoring a traditional grading system towards the general idea of standards-based grading (http://fnoschese.wordpress.com/category/standards-based-grading-2):

1. Shift from tracking by chapter to tracking by concept.
2. Allow opportunities for students to show growth.
3. Don’t grade homework and practice.
4. Provide timely and effective feedback.
5. Spiral concepts throughout the curriculum and your assessments.
6. Give shorter, more frequent quizzes.
8. Provide clear goals and expectations for performance.


10. Do what works best for your students and your situation.

Other complaints about standards-based grading include:


2. It is subjective, confusing, broadly-based, and demotivating; lacking in distinctions and consequences; fails to produce the commonly expected GPA; does not encourage students to excel. (See http://www.squidoo.com/a-case-against-standards-based-grading-what-s-wrong-with-traditional-letter-grades.)

3. The practice of comparing students to standards as opposed to each other does not prepare students for life in college or the real world; both of which are extremely competitive. (See http://www.squidoo.com/a-case-against-standards-based-grading-what-s-wrong-with-traditional-letter-grades.)

4. As usually implemented, standards-based grading requires teachers to employ standards that have been created on a state level, or worse, often crafted by special interest groups or with input from special interest groups. The standards may or may not have any practical value in a given classroom. (See http://see.ludwig.lajuntaschools.org/?p=799.)

5. Standards-based grading does not allow a teacher to grade, at least in part, on effort. (See http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2012/09/bruno-is-standards-based-grading-a-good-idea.html#.UtSioLCA19A.)
Given the reliance on traditional grading systems by institutes of higher education for admissions and scholarships, how would colleges and universities adapt their criteria to account for a high school’s standards-based grading system?

Sharla Glass

The question of how college admissions offices look at standards-based grading reports is a deciding factor for high schools contemplating standards-based grading. Several different reports have verified that most colleges already acknowledge the vast discrepancies between high school grading policies and transcripts.\textsuperscript{1,2,3} Colleges have entrance policies in place that try to take into account more than just the transcript in an effort to see the “whole person” and decide if the student is a “good fit” for their school. Some of the factors include:

- Background from the guidance department on the high school’s students, grading scales, and academic rigor.
- Evaluation of a high school’s past students and their success at the institution.
- GPA recalculation based on specific core courses.
- GPA recalculation to exclude or include weights for honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses.
- Required or recommended interview with an admissions officer, in-person or via the Internet.
- Visits to high schools, where officers can meet with guidance counseling staff\textsuperscript{2}

Furthermore, demonstrating achievement of common core standards is usually “seen as a strong indicator of college/career success… The components of standards-based grading have the capacity to enhance achievement of learning targets and increase students’ understanding of the specific skills, strategies, knowledge and processes to succeed through the use of well-articulated targets and formative assessment. Students are better able to learn self-advocacy and do the necessary work to achieve the learning targets prior to summative assessments. Students are able to take increased ownership of their learning.”\textsuperscript{3}

There is a growing trend for colleges themselves to offer proficiency-based degree programs that give adult students credit for classes, work experiences, volunteer work and life skills based on the ability to demonstrate the proficiency through a project, test or portfolio.\textsuperscript{4} This trend could benefit high school students who desire to work toward college credit when they have met and/or exceeded the high school core standards.
What are some examples of institutions of higher education that are experimenting with standards-based grading?

Scott Hutchins

A 2005 survey of 65 universities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the USA found that while there are shared aspirations for criteria-based assessment and grading, there is a lack of consistency in interpretation and implementation (Sadler, 2005). The four models found in use were:

- **Grading Model 1**: Achievement of course objectives
- **Grading Model 2**: Overall achievement as measured by score totals
- **Grading Model 3**: Grades reflecting patterns of achievement
- **Grading Model 4**: Specified qualitative criteria or attributes

Looking at higher education in the United States, the same situation appears to be the case. Standards-based grading is being used independently by educators, but there is no broadly-held vision for deploying it across the country or even across an entire university. Examples of standards-based grading in use in higher education include the following:

- **Andy Runquist** is using collaborative oral assessments as part of his Standards-Based Theoretical Mechanics course.
- **Adam Glesser** is implementing standards-based grading in his Calculus courses (blog).
- **Bret Benesh** introduced a new standards-based grading system for his math courses.
- **Mylene** teaches technical school electronics courses and replaces the achievement levels for each standard with a system where the standards build on each other and are assessed using the binary yes or no system.

A different - but related - question is what impact does standards-based grading of high school students have on their college admissions. A report from the Hanover Research Council states that “Generally, admissions offices treat all grades as welcome indicators of high school performance while implicitly acknowledging that every school has a unique perspective, student body, and system.” None of the college admissions offices contacted expressed a concern or a negative view of a transcript based on standards-based grading. This research included feedback from the following top-ranked institutions: Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University, MA Institute of Technology, Stanford University, California Institute of Technology, University of Pennsylvania Columbia University, Duke University, University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Cornell University, Brown University, Emory University, Vanderbilt University, Carnegie Mellon University, University of Virginia.
What is the current status of the discussion around standards-based grading in Unit 5? What efforts are being undertaken to test it out?

Denise Schuster

There are currently several teams who have implemented standards-based grading in their Unit 5 classrooms. One is a sixth-grade team at Parkside Junior High School comprised of two teachers and approximately 50 students. These teachers made the change to standards-based grading about 5 years ago after hearing Rick Wormeli, an expert on standards-based grading, speak at a conference and deciding to adopt his philosophies as best practices for educating students. The teachers share their philosophy with parents at curriculum night in the fall, and provide assessment descriptors as a basis for their evaluation of student work.

- **4 – Mastery**: A student demonstrates thorough understanding by doing something substantive rather than echoing it. Students who master material can break it into component parts, explain it and alternative perspectives to others, and use it purposefully in another situation.

- **3.5 – Strong**: The student demonstrates a better than baseline understanding of material; however, it falls short of full mastery at the time. A student can display mastery at a later time after more learning.

- **3 – Adequate**: A student who displays adequate understanding has a firm grasp on the baseline standard descriptors or concepts.

- **2 – Needs Development**: If a student does not meet baseline criteria, they need development of that concept. This may require re-teaching, more practice or additional study to get to the adequate level.

Parents and teachers communicate often through email, and teachers are able to provide detailed feedback on what specific skills each student needs to improve upon.

As students learn concepts throughout the year, teachers are able to assess their progress and provide feedback on their achievement as it correlates to each of the common core learning standards. One distinction is that, while feedback (which would currently translate into a “grade”) lets the students know how they rate toward mastery of the standard, the only measure that “counts” is the assessment, when mastery is expected. Assessments are not just tests, but also include group projects, presentations or any activities designed to be a demonstration of the learning objectives.

Assessment scores are given relative to each learning standard, so it is possible to receive multiple scores on one assignment, even across subject areas. For example, if a student has written an essay for social studies, he may receive a 4 for mastery of the material (tied to a specific social studies standard(s)), but only a 3 for the language arts standard(s) being assessed with his writing. All standards measured for a subject are currently being averaged to come up
with a letter grade that fits within the Unit 5 grading system. The Parkside team currently uses a free software program called “Mastery Connect” to keep track of scores related to each learning standard and then manually converts them to a letter grade. There are teachers at the high school level who are currently testing use of Skyward for standards-based grading records.

Students have learned that there is no such thing as a fatal grade, because quarter grades are figured by tallying the mode (or most common) score for each standard being assessed. Several “2” scores at the beginning of the quarter do not doom a student to a “maximum attainable” average grade. Assessments have also become more individualized to each student, because the teacher is able to tailor assessments relative to their individual skills. An example is in spelling, where each student has 7 spelling words to learn each week, but those words are different for each student. In addition, students receive a score both for their spelling (one standard) and for their ability to use these words in context (another standard). On every assignment that is given, students are told for which standards they will be held accountable.

Challenges for Unit 5 in adopting standards-based grading across an entire grade level would require that teachers not just agree on what each number on the scale means for every learning standard, but also that teachers agree on HOW to assess students. Specific examples cited included consistency in assessing only the work and how it relates to mastery of the standard - as opposed to taking points off for not including a name on a paper or giving extra credit for donating Box Tops for a class collection. Social and community responsibility are evaluated through other means, such as homework passes and team rewards. The teachers currently using standards-based grading in the classroom are confident that it can be effective and viable when other Unit 5 teachers are introduced to its benefits and given the same development and educational tools they have received.
What do teachers and parents of Unit 5 students think about moving to a standards-based grading system? How have teachers and parents in other communities reacted to a standards-based system?

Ebony Nebel

I took this question “as is” to parents and teachers within and outside of Unit 5, including parents in other communities who have and have not adopted or heard of standards-based grading.

Unit 5 parents of students have said that while they appreciate knowing what benchmarks their kids should strive for, when it comes to grading, they find the standards-based system confusing and would prefer traditional grading.

- One parent wondered if standards-based grading would be a system that would remain long-term or is it another “bandwagon program” that will ultimately fall apart.
- Several parents saw no need to change the current grading system.
- Parents expressed a desire for there to be a matching letter grade.
- One parent asked if standards-based grading was directly related to the new common core standards and if they had to go hand-in-hand.
- Parents asked whether standards-based grading would be implemented in higher grades and, if so, how would it be implemented.
- Some parents were worried that standards-based grading wouldn’t help their children - who are already high performers – progress.
- Parents wondered if it would add unnecessarily to teachers’ workloads.
- Parents were very concerned about over-testing the students and that teachers would only be teaching to tests.

Unit 5 teachers were pretty neutral on the subject.

- Some teachers said that standards-based grading would help keep grading unbiased.
- Some teachers said that standards-based grading provides clear definitions as to where their students should be academically.

Parents from other communities that have adopted standards-based grading offered these comments.

- Parents had a lot of the same concerns that Unit 5 parents expressed.
- “Bandwagon programs” was mentioned.
- Parents expressed liking it for their elementary school students but not for older kids.
- Some parents weren’t even aware that standards-based grading was implemented in their districts.

Teachers from other communities that have adopted standards-based grading system offered the following.
• Some teachers in a district with very low academic progress stated that having clear benchmarks helped them identify where their students were academically and has helped them identify where to put focus for poor performing students.
• Some teachers said that it pairs well with the Common Core Standards but fear it won’t stick around very long.
• Teachers said that standards-based grading is difficult to explain to parents, especially those who are stuck on traditional grades.

Parents in communities without standards-based grading offered the following.
• Some were interested in it and would welcome it into their schools.
• Some parents stated that it would be confusing.
• Some parents asked if it would continue into the upper grade levels.
• Some parents said that it was a waste of time.

Overall, parents wanted uniformity. Many parents are reluctant to support standards-based grading, saying that it was too confusing. They would like to keep traditional grading if that’s how their students would be graded in the upper grade levels.

Teachers seemed to like standards-based grading as it made it easier to grade a large number of students in an unbiased manner.
How is standards-based grading implemented for gifted and talented students, special education students, and English Language Learners (ELL)?

Tamara Driskill

Most districts that have implemented standards-based grading respond to this question in this manner...“Students with an IEP, 504, or English Language Learning needs will continue to receive the accommodations they are eligible to receive and they will continue to receive appropriate support and/or interventions. Teachers will report how they are performing as measured against content standards. When those standards are not aligned with the grade level they are assigned, parents will be notified that the student proficiency report is for a standard other than that of the assigned grade.” (See http://www.besd.net/curriculum/standards.php.)

There is little information on how standards based grading will affect gifted students. Most districts that have implemented standards-based grading continue to use test scores to identify gifted students.
Given all that the members of the CAC subcommittee on standards-based grading have learned, what are their recommendations for Unit 5?

Subcommittee on Standards-Based Grading

If standards-based grading truly is all that it is described to be in the educational literature, it could be a “win” for all major stakeholders: for teachers, who can more easily identify what students know, use formative assessment patterns to guide learning and make changes as needed, and have all assessment linked to concrete standards; for parents, who can appreciate assessments closer to real-world employment evaluations, more easily identify what their child has learned, and see increased test scores for their child; and students, whose expectations for achievement are clearer with grades based only on what they have learned, and who are put more in charge of their learning. The community-at-large would also benefit from a future workforce whose early educational preparation is guaranteed to meet or exceed standards that define what it means to have a basic education in the United States.

However, it is clear there is much dissension and controversy surrounding standards-based grading – for every comment in support of standards-based grading, there is another vociferously against it. Much of the negativity surrounding standards-based grading can be traced to misperception, lack of support for teachers and parents, botched implementations, reluctance to change, and fear – parents’ fear that standards-based grading will undermine their children’s education, that individual needs will not be met adequately (especially at the extremes of ability), and that standards-based grading is just another passing educational fad. It is interesting to note that all of these barriers – with the exception of reluctance to change – can be largely influenced by the school district through the approach they use to implement.

Our subcommittee is a microcosm of the spectrum of parent opinions toward standards-based grading – some members are in favor of implementing it, some are largely in favor but have questions and concerns that need to be addressed, and some are against it. On the whole, our group is in favor of implementation but with a strong caveat – what will make or break standards-based grading in Unit 5 is the quality of the implementation. In the annals of standards-based grading horror stories, things went badly when implementation was poorly executed – when parents were not provided with clearly articulated information about standards-based grading, when parents did not have their questions and concerns answered adequately and felt unheard, when teachers were not adequately trained and supported, when students recognized the system was not being implemented consistently across classrooms.

We recommend that Unit 5 seriously consider implementing standards-based grading across all grade levels, but only if its implementation is well planned, expertly executed, and largely supported by those who will be affected by it. It is expected that there will be some parent resistance, and the manner in which the district addresses that resistance will result in either
gaining further supporters or alienating parents. It is natural that parents will have questions and concerns, and all need to be addressed seriously, sensibly, and with respect. The smoothest implementations happen when the change is supported by the stakeholders – when there is “buy in”. Getting parents, teachers, students, and the community at-large on board with a change of this magnitude will require some marketing, especially around the benefits of the system.

To that end, if the district decides to implement the system, we suggest the following:

- Create a well-articulated timeline of the entire process;
- Pilot test the use of the system in several classrooms at different levels for a school year.
  Provide training and support to teachers who volunteer (teachers who will later become peer educators and supporters).
- Evaluate the pilot implementation to identify and address any problems that arise along the way and to provide an overall assessment on the success of the implementation.
- Expand the implementation to one or two educational levels (i.e., elementary, junior high, senior high) over two or more years.
- Parent education - develop parent educational materials on standards-based grading, including PowerPoint presentations available on-line, clearly articulated brochures on-line and sent home on paper. All materials should be available in the major languages used among the school districts’ families. Parent nights at the schools could provide educational time and an opportunity for parents to have their questions answered.
- Student education - hold classroom- or school-level presentations and discussions and provide printed or on-line materials for students appropriate to their developmental level.
- Community education – hold a series of community forum nights where community members can be educated, provide comments, and have their questions answered.
  Provide written documentation of the implementation process in the form of newspaper articles.
- Teacher education and support – provide teachers with high quality training on how to implement standards-based grading. Research, select, and provide the software system necessary to implement standards-based grading in the most efficient way possible, and assure that there will be sufficient MIS staff to troubleshoot problems. Identify a team of designated staff who can provide support and/or each mentor a small group of teachers.
- Input from stakeholders – Consider putting together a team of parents, teachers, community members, and district staff to serve as an advisory board for the implementation.
- Make sure the system is implemented consistently across grades and classrooms.
- Evaluate the implementation, perhaps using on-line surveys to track stakeholder opinions toward the implementation process over time.
So much rides on the quality of the implementation, so time spent on researching, planning, and enacting as smooth a roll-out as possible – with buy-in from parents, students, teachers, and the community – will be well worth it. The price of a failed implementation is a scenario like that in Osseo, Minnesota, which very likely could have been prevented with more effort to include and support teachers and educate parents.
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**Research on standards-based grading**

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Marzano Research Laboratory http://www.marzanoresearch.com/robert-j-marzano


Quakertown Community School District, SBG FAQs for Parents http://www.qcsd.org/Page/8180


**Implementation**

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Examples of communities

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Resources for implementation

Adams 12 Five Star Schools parent brochure  

Barriers to implementation

Action-Reaction: Reflections on the Dynamics of Teaching  
http://fnoschese.wordpress.com/

Center for Digital Education
Maple Grove Patch
Hundreds of Teachers Rally Against Standard-Based Grading

Press and News – Standards-Based Grading Isn’t Measuring Up

Science Education on the Edge: How to Make Standards-Based Education Another Fad
http://see.ludwig.lajuntaschools.org/?p=799

Squidoo – A Case Against Standards-Based Grading – What’s Wrong with Traditional Letter Grades?

This Week in Education - Scholastic: Administrators - Bruno: Is Standards-Based Grading A Good Idea?
http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2012/09/bruno-is-standards-based-grading-a-good-idea.html#.UtSioLCA19A

**Colleges and universities adaptation**

http://newenglandssc.org/resources/resolutions

2) Study on reaction of colleges and universities to report cards based on standards-based grading
http://www.wauwatosa.k12.wi.us/StudentLearning/Grading/Hanover_summary_of_SBG.pdf

3) Standards-based Grading FAQ for Parents
http://www.qcsd.org/Page/8180

4) Competency-Based Degree Programs in the U.S: Postsecondary Credentials for Measurable Student Learning and Performance
http://www.cael.org/pdfs/2012_CompetencyBasedPrograms

**Colleges and universities experimenting with standards-based grading**

GL(s, R) - A Multivariable Calculus List
I’m Not Watching T.V. – Collaborative Oral Assessments
http://andyrundquist.blogspot.com/2011/03/collaborative-oral-assessments.html


Shifting Phases – New Assessment Scheme: Details, Pros, Cons

Solvable by Radicals – New Grading System

Syllabus for Theoretical Mechanics, Andy Rundquist
http://aca-fac.hamline.edu/arundquist/php/summary/syllabus.php?class_id=60

**Standards-based grading in Unit 5**

Mastery Connect – Mastery Learning Made Simple (free assessment tracking software)
www.masteryconnect.com


**Reactions from parents and teachers**

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**Gifted/talented, English language learners, and students with disabilities**

Box Elder School District - Standards Based Instruction, Frequently Asked Questions
http://www.besd.net/curriculum/standards.php