



Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Students

Why are we changing to standards-based grading (SBG)?

Traditional grading scales, which are based on points and percentages, only serve to rank and order students. This system of grading emphasizes the outcome (grade/GPA) rather than the learning experience. A standards-based grading system does not rank students but rather focuses on growth. Students are assessed on clearly defined learning goals that are aligned with state standards. They are offered multiple opportunities and various ways to demonstrate proficiency and track their progress towards learning goals. Traditional grades combine many elements to determine a final grade that can include: test scores, quizzes, homework, class participation, and extra credit. Standards-based grading separates these elements so parents know exactly what their child knows and is able to do. In a traditional grading system, a parent may not know whether their child received a low grade because he needs academic help or if he just can't remember to turn in his homework. Standards-based grading uses clear learning targets that allows teachers to grade for growth and provide parents with more detailed information.

Why are we moving away from letter grades?

There are a number of advantages to using proficiency based grading rather than letter based grades. The use of letter based grades can often confuse students and parents as they don't clearly communicate the level of learning students are achieving. The criteria behind earning a particular letter grade can vary greatly among districts, schools, and even teachers within a school, leaving students and parents confused. In standards-based grading, the performance indicators clearly communicate the level of learning students have demonstrated on the standards during the grading period.

How does SBG change the way my child experiences learning?

SBG provides parents and students with specific feedback on each learning standard. Since the focus of instruction is on mastery for students, they will have more than one opportunity to demonstrate mastery, if and when it is needed. Feedback from assessments tell students what learning goals they have mastered and what they still need to work on. Students "own" their learning which creates a culture of learning that is more engaging for students and embraces learning as the goal.

Will SBG change the curriculum?

No. The curriculum of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is designed to be standards-based and has always been aligned with state and national standards.

How does SBG motivate my student in their learning?

One of the greatest advantages of SBG is its impact on student motivation. Research shows that SBG can have a significant positive impact on student learning and school culture. SBG helps students clearly understand what they are expected to know and be able to do. Additionally, students are given opportunities to progress toward their mastery of standards without penalty and fear of failure. They learn the value of learning through practice and perseverance, while embracing academic challenges.



Why is my child graded using a number scale (1, 2, 3, 4) rather than letter grades?

When students are graded on standards-based learning targets, a number scale is used to identify where they are in the learning process. The following number scale provides a description of what each number means.

Archdiocesan Number Scale (grades K-3)

3	Student work demonstrates a consistent understanding of grade level standards. Student satisfactorily applies concepts and skills.
2	Student work demonstrates a partial understanding of grade level standards. Student exhibits inconsistent application of concepts and skills.
1	Student work demonstrates a partial understanding of grade level standards. Student completes independent tasks only with assistance.

Archdiocesan Number Scale (grades 4-8)

4	Student work demonstrates a thorough and consistent understanding of grade level standards. Student independently integrates concepts and skills.
3	Student work demonstrates a consistent understanding of grade level standards. Student satisfactorily applies concepts and skills.
2	Student work demonstrates a partial understanding of grade level standards. Student exhibits inconsistent application of concepts and skills.
1	Student work demonstrates a partial understanding of grade level standards. Student completes independent tasks only with assistance.

**Do the numbers on the scale match letter grades?**

A common misconception for those new to grading for mastery is that the 3 or 4-point rubric scales used are interchangeable with the traditional letter-based grading scale. When implementing SBG, it's important to note that a numeric score on a rubric does not have the same meaning as a traditional letter grade. For example, this means that a 4 on a rubric is not the equivalent of an A but rather indicates students' progress toward the mastery of standards.

What is the purpose of a standards-based report card?

The purpose of a standards-based report card is to better communicate your child's achievement on specific learning targets in a subject area. These learning targets are based on the standards adopted by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. A standards-based report card provides more detailed information about a student's progress than a traditional report card.

What is the advantage of the standards-based report card for parents?

A standards-based report card gives you a much better picture of what your child knows and is able to do. A traditional report card provides limited information, often consisting of one overall grade per subject. While a standards-based report card provides feedback on your child's progress in several developmental areas within a subject. Additionally, standards-based report cards allow students, parents and teachers to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in a given subject area.

How is this report card different from previous report cards?

A standards-based report card better identifies progress towards the mastery of learning targets. Evidence of learning is collected through assignments, tests, observations, projects and performances. A standards-based grade does not include practice work and formative activities that take place during instruction.

Why isn't there a GPA on the new report card?

GPA's create a ranking system to compare students to each other. This is a questionable practice as the use of grades to rank students against each other has little value to most students. Sorting students into "successful" or "not-as-successful" categories is a practice that has little positive impact on the learning process as it rewards and validates only a small number of students. Our goal is to help ALL students achieve mastery of the standards; the use of GPAs does not help us achieve that aim.

Some parents ask if the absence of GPAs on report cards will harm their child's chances at acceptance in certain high schools. In speaking with local high schools, we have found that they use indicators beyond GPA because grades are not necessarily accurate indicators of current achievement or future academic success. Furthermore, high schools receive applicants from a wide variety of middle schools and grades are not a standardized unit of measurement.

Will all of the standards be shown on the report card?

Due to the large number of standards that students are assessed on in a given year, a report card displaying all standards would become overwhelming due to size. Additionally, a report card is only one communication tool used to convey student progress. Our current report card features broad categories that correspond to specific learning targets.



Does the report card give information about behavior, effort, and study skills?

Although, these skills are very important for student success, they are not true indicators of academic progress. Therefore, they are reported separately from academic skills in the section titled “Personal/Social Growth and Learner Behaviors.”

Are there any disadvantages to SBG?

There are no disadvantages to SBG, but there are challenges. Working for “the grade” is a concept that is deeply internalized in our school culture. SBG is a paradigm shift that requires education and communication for students, parents, and teachers. SBG also requires time for teachers to rethink how they are grading assessments and time to design new assessments that are specifically targeted to standards requiring higher levels of understanding.