

A Parent's Guide to Standards-Based Assessment, Grading, and Reporting



A Message to Parents

The Second Vatican Council highlighted the value of Catholic education in the life of the Church and its fundamental mission to spread the Gospel. While our society often places competition and academic excellence above the development of a student's moral and intellectual excellence, our Catholic schools have an essential obligation to provide our students with more than just a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare them for high school, college, and beyond. Catholic education must also prepare students to take their place in society as disciples of Christ; instilling in them a sense of service and challenging them to live the Gospel through daily interactions with all whom they come in contact.

Children and their learning are too complex to be reduced to a simple letter grade. When used correctly, grades provide vital information to students, parents, and other interested persons that enhance both teaching and learning. Grading helps identify what learning standards have been attained and where additional work is needed. The goal is to provide a picture of the whole child: academic skills and knowledge as well as non-academic areas such as effort and behavior.

A standards-based reporting system will provide a more accurate indication of academic progress and is designed to present information so that intervention or enrichment strategies can be applied to help each child learn and to honor the dignity of each student as a child of God.

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OVERVIEW: KEY UNDERSTANDINGS AND DEFINITIONS

Assessment is a comprehensive set of practices that analyze, inform, and drive student learning.

There are two types of assessment: formative and summative. The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools** define formative and summative assessment as follows:

- **Formative:** Demonstrated learning by the student; the instructional process that provides ongoing, growth-producing feedback that informs and supports improved teaching and learning.
- **Summative:** Demonstration of proficiency in knowledge and skills at the end of a period of instruction.

*Ozar, L. A., & Weitzel-O'Neill, P. (Eds.). (2012). National standards and benchmarks for effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary schools. Chicago, IL: Loyola University Chicago, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness.

Assessment serves three purposes:

1. Provides a **defined measurement of student growth and achievement over a designated time period**. The level of student performance necessary to achieve mastery is clearly defined and understood by both the student and the teacher prior to the end of the designated time period. These assessments are **summative**.
2. Provides both the student and teacher with reliable **feedback of the student's growth and achievement of mastery** at any given time during the process and throughout the duration of the learning experiences. These assessments are **formative**.
3. Provides **feedback and data on the student's growth and achievement of mastery** to the teacher to guide and differentiate the instructional practices, strategies, and experiences the student engages in during the designated learning period.

WHY STANDARDS-BASED GRADING?

Standards-based grading is based on the principle that grades should **convey how well students have achieved standards**. In other words, grades are not about what students *earn*; they are about what students *learn*. Brookhart, S.M. (2011). "Starting the Conversation About Grading." *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 10-14.

A traditional grading system reduces everything that a student does to a single letter grade, making it neither timely nor actionable. Standards-based instruction, assessment, and grading has the potential to provide a rich array of information on a student's academic progress.

There are several advantages of standards-based assessment, grading, and reporting:

- It ensures consistent expectations across grade levels.
- It helps teachers and students focus on the standards in their learning activities.
- Assessments are aligned to standards and provide evidence of what a student knows and/or can do.
- It provides feedback as to a student's proficiency level allowing the teacher to better individualize instruction.
- It provides parents with valuable information on how their child is progressing on the critical concepts and skills of the grade level as well as individual standards.

Research has shown that letter grades do not motivate students to learn. On the contrary, research has found three consistent effects of using and, especially, emphasizing the importance of letter or number grades:

1. Grades tend to reduce students' interest in the learning itself. Research in the field of motivational psychology has found that the more people are rewarded for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward (Kohn, 1993). Thus, it shouldn't be surprising that when students are told they'll need to know something for a test or, more generally, that something they're about to do will count for a grade, they are likely to come to view that task (or book or idea) as a chore.
2. Grades tend to reduce students' preference for challenging tasks. Students of all ages who have been led to concentrate on getting a good grade are likely to pick the easiest possible assignment if given a choice (Harter, 1978; Harter and Guzman, 1986; Kage, 1991; Milton et al., 1986). If there is more pressure to get an A, then there is less inclination to truly challenge oneself. Thus, students who cut corners may not be lazy as much as rational; they are adapting to an environment where good grades, not intellectual exploration, are what counts.

3. Grades tend to reduce the quality of students' thinking. Given that students may lose interest in what they're learning as a result of grades, it makes sense that they're also apt to think less deeply. One series of studies, for example, found that students given numerical grades were significantly less creative than those who received qualitative feedback but no grades. The more the task required creative thinking, in fact, the worse the performance of students who knew they were going to be graded. Providing students with comments in addition to a grade didn't help; the highest achievement occurred only when comments were given instead of numerical scores (Butler, 1987; Butler, 1988; Butler and Nisan, 1986).

Intrinsic motivation is the most powerful kind of motivation. When students are involved in the learning process by knowing their strengths and where they need to improve, they can work with their teachers and parents to set meaningful goals of excellence, strive to achieve the goals, and experience success.

This is an excellent video explaining what was discussed in this section:

[Eliminating Points and Averages](#)



STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION

Instruction is focused on standards within our courses of study including appropriate and meaningful activities that engage the student in the learning process. Students focus on true mastery of a topic or skill and teachers focus on teaching standards that every student must learn. Each lesson taught is connected to a standard, and learning targets along the way mark progress toward meeting the standard. Learning targets are clear and opportunities to meet them are varied.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Curriculum standard statements are concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific grade level. The curriculum in all content areas is aligned with corresponding state/national standards. All coursework is tied to standards, which are meant to prepare students for success in high school to ensure that they are college and career ready. The curriculum for all content areas is available at:

[CURRICULUM GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS](#)

PRIORITY AND SUPPORTING STANDARDS

Priority standards refer to a subset of all learning standards that educators in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee have determined to be the highest priority or most important for all students to learn. These are the standards that appear on the report card because they represent information that needs to be communicated to parents on a regular basis. It is important to note that priority standards do not preclude the teaching of the supporting standards. When you log into your school's student information system, you will see both priority and supporting standards, but only progress on the priority standards will appear on the report card.

STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT

Students know in advance what they will need to learn, and they will have more than one opportunity to show they have met the standard. Teachers will use both informal (formative) and formal (summative) assessment to measure progress. Formative is assessment *for learning* and is characterized by direct and constructive feedback. Summative is assessment *of learning* and is designed to provide information or evidence about achievement of standards.

Assessments can include portfolios, projects, quizzes, tests and daily assignments. Students will have multiple assessment opportunities –and different assessment options – to demonstrate their understanding of the standards. All assessment items are aligned to standards and determination of mastery is defined and communicated to the student prior to the student taking any summative assessment.

EVIDENCE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Students are graded based on the evidence of achievement. This evidence can come from a variety of sources. Regardless of the source, students must be given the freedom to try and fail because that is integral to the learning process. When considering evidence, teachers give priority to the most recent and most comprehensive evidence.

STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING

Standards-based grading and reporting are a set of teaching and reporting practices that communicate how a student is performing against a predetermined set of expectations. Students are graded on the development of skills and knowledge (what they know and can do) rather than their completion of tasks. The primary purpose for report cards and progress reports is to give parents, teachers and students a clear picture of a child's academic progress and growth in relationship to archdiocesan standards. Grades are determined by analyzing the evidence of learning (see **Evidence of Achievement** above) and each student's work is measured against the standard, not against the performance of other students.

In assessing the whole child, two separate categories will be reported:

- Academic achievement, which is an accurate evaluation of what a student knows and is able to demonstrate.
- Success Indicators, which describe the actions and behaviors that support achievement.

GRADING AND REPORTING

GRADING

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee uses **scoring guides** to clearly define learning targets that communicate the knowledge and skills necessary for students to reach mastery on each priority standard. These scoring guides help students and parents understand the level of mastery they have achieved at any given time.

Level 1 would only apply to students who lack even the most basic knowledge in a given standard. This could include a student who has learning challenges identified in a Service Plan or IEP.

Level 2 is the grade given when a student is not at the mastery level, but working on the necessary vocabulary and learning targets identified in the scoring guide. A student remains at Level 2 until they have demonstrated full mastery of the priority standard(s) being assessed.

Level 3 is the grade given when a student has demonstrated proficiency on a given standard. It is important that a student is given more than one opportunity to provide evidence of mastery before the priority standard is given a grade on the report card. These assessments are summative in nature, but don't necessarily require a formal written test. The most recent and comprehensive evidence is given the greatest consideration when determining a grade.




Level 4 represents an understanding and application of knowledge at a level beyond what is expected at a given grade level. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Level 4 appears on the Proficiency Scale beginning in grade 4. It is important to understand what level 4 means:

Level 4 is:	Level 4 is not:
High on Bloom's Taxonomy or DOK level	An "A"
Beyond what is taught in the classroom	Extra credit
Something most students do not attain	A reward for non-academic factors
Often a result of high ability, high interest, or high background knowledge	The teacher's instructional focus





REPORTING

The **Proficiency Scale** communicates the level at which students are able to demonstrate understanding and application of concepts and skills aligned with grade level standards on the report card.

Grades 1-3 Proficiency Scale

	<p>3 Proficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student demonstrates consistent understanding and application of concepts and skills aligned with grade level standards. ● Student can complete assigned tasks independently.
	<p>2 Developing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student demonstrates partial understanding of grade level standards. ● Student can sometimes complete learning activities without assistance.
	<p>1 Emerging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student needs more time to develop understanding of grade level standards. ● Student can complete learning activities with assistance.

Grades 4-8 Proficiency Scale

	<p>4 Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student demonstrates understanding of concepts and skills extending beyond grade level standards. ● Student can independently complete self-directed studies.
	<p>3 Proficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student demonstrates consistent understanding and application of concepts and skills aligned with grade level standards. ● Student can complete assigned tasks independently.
	<p>2 Developing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student demonstrates partial understanding of grade level standards. ● Student can sometimes complete learning tasks without assistance.
	<p>1 Emerging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student needs more time to develop understanding of grade level standards. ● Student can complete learning activities with assistance.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

Behavioral attributes and characteristics play a significant role in learning and are closely linked with academic progress and success. It is important to place work habits and behaviors on an equal footing with academic success. Reporting and teaching the behaviors and skills needed to be successful and productive citizens grounded in the Catholic faith are a priority. They should, however, be reported out separately. By including *Success Indicators* as a separate reporting category, teachers can more honestly communicate about such matters as behavior, participation, and responsibility without distorting a student's actual academic grades.

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has identified three categories of *Success Indicators*: Student as Learner, Student as Citizen, and Student as Disciple. Under each category we have included statements that clearly articulate the behaviors and skills students must learn and demonstrate to reach their full potential. These statements serve as the basis for conversations with students and parents and provide guidance in identifying areas of strength and areas in need of attention.

These *Success Indicators* will be part of the 2020-21 report card revision.

Student as Learner:

- Transitions effectively between activities.
- Demonstrates persistence in learning tasks.
- Collaborates effectively to achieve defined outcomes.
- Accepts and applies constructive feedback.
- Completes learning tasks efficiently and independently.
- Engages in learning in various settings.
- Sets goals and monitors progress.

Student as Citizen:

- Demonstrates respect for people and property.
- Engages in active listening.
- Demonstrates honesty.
- Uses socially appropriate language.
- Demonstrates empathy and kindness.
- Practices appropriate conflict resolution skills.
- Considers the impact of behavior on others.

Student as Disciple:

- Demonstrates care for God’s creation.
- Demonstrates a spirit of selfless service.
- Expresses forgiveness in word and action.
- Manifests a willingness to grow in faith and share beliefs (Middle School only).

HIGH SCHOOL AND STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

Will my child be prepared for college if the high school uses a traditional grading system?

As far as preparing students for colleges and universities (or high school), clearly the best preparation that any school can offer is to engage students in a rigorous and challenging curriculum and then do what is possible to guarantee that students master what that curriculum includes.

“A standards-based report card identifies the specific learning goals within the curriculum so that appropriate rigor can be ensured. It also communicates more detailed information about higher levels of success. These distinct benefits serve to prepare students well, no matter what type of learning environment they enter after they leave school.” (Guskey & Bailey 2010)

“Schools use grades because it’s one of those things somebody once decided on and now everybody goes along with it. I don’t know where it started, but I know where it stops - in the real world. You don’t see supervisors telling their employees, ‘Great job, I’m going to give you an A.’ Or, ‘You really screwed up here; that’s a C-.’ No, in the real world, adults get real feedback and indications of where they need improvement.” (Littky & Grabelle 2004)

Identifying one’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner, being self-motivated to meet course objectives, developing strong study habits, and mastering course standards are all aspects of standards-based assessment, grading, and reporting that will help students in high school and beyond.

If students meet the standards in grades 6-8, what grades can they expect in high school?

The grades that students receive in high school will depend upon the degree to which they meet their teachers’ communicated expectations. Students who meet grade level content standards in grades 6-8 and practice developing scholarly skills, reflected by the success indicators such as taking responsibility and attending to detail, are on track to perform very well and receive good grades in high school. Historically, students who pay attention, study, and produce quality work find educational, career, and personal success no matter what the grading system.