

Spartan Spotlight  
Standards-Based Learning and Reporting  
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This year Somerset Middle School fully shifted to a standards-based system of learning and reporting student achievement and growth. The main purpose of standards-based learning is to keep better track of the components of learning progress through the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments with identified standards. Standards-based learning will also provide better communication to students, parents, teachers and administrators on what each student knows and is able to do in relation to standards.

Our 2011-2016 Strategic Plan drove our work and provided us a roadmap to align our curriculum, instruction and assessments to our state or national standards. We have studied Thomas Guskey, Rick Wormeli, Ken O'Connor, Rick Stiggins and Robert Marzano in order to understand why a change in assessment and grading practices benefits students.

**Why the shift to a standards-based system?**

- Improved communication, accuracy, and feedback for parents, students, and teachers: Parents and students will see areas of academic strength and weakness in the gradebook. Behaviors are reported separately on the report card, so that reported learning of academics or course content is more accurate. Teachers will have a better idea of what standards they need to re-teach. Students will know on which standards they need additional learning opportunities or practice.
- Increased student engagement in learning: A well-implemented standards-based system lends itself to student engagement because students have a clearer idea of learning expectations and can initiate or solicit assistance in taking next steps to achieve the expectations.
- Standards-based learning involves practices that have been shown in educational research to improve student learning. For example, the use of formative assessments (assessment for learning) and having students understand their learning targets as the purpose for their learning activities.

**How does a standards-based system work? How is it different from a traditional system?**

- A traditional approach is to assign grades, at least in part, for doing assigned work (earning). A standards-based approach describes levels of a student's learning by comparing the student's performance or demonstration of learning to descriptions of levels of learning.
- In a standards-based system, assessment results are accompanied by the standards that are being assessed, so that information about learning and progress can be monitored by the standard.
- Each assessment is reported by the standard that it is associated with and with a predetermined proficiency scale or rubric. In Somerset, we use a system with a 4 representing the highest level (4-Exceeding Target; 3- Meeting Target; 2-Working

Toward Target; 1-Significantly Below Target; 0-No Evidence Toward Target). Numerical grades are then derived from these ratings.

- In the gradebook, students and parents can see not only the standards that are being assessed, but the level of understanding or performance related to the standards.
- Better grades are a result of higher performance on standards as opposed to an accumulation of points.

### **Are there other benefits to a standards-based system?**

- Yes!
  - Behaviors are reported separately from academics. This is important so that grades accurately reflect course learning and are not blurred by non-academic factors. In Somerset, we report learner behaviors in four categories: Behavior, Work Completion, Participation and Working in Groups.
  - Learning will be described with a scale representing four levels of learning (4-Exceeding Target; 3- Meeting Target; 2-Working Toward Target; 1-Significantly Below Target; 0-No Evidence Toward Target).
    - “Exceeding Target” represents a high level of learning, beyond course content
    - “Meeting Target” means meeting the grade level or course expectations
    - “Working Toward Target” means approaching grade level or course expectations
    - “Significantly Below Target” means little evidence of learning
    - Teachers will continue to teach to the highest level of expectations. This scale is based on the work of Bob Marzano and is being used K-8 to provide continuity and consistency. This scale is commonly used in standards-based systems.
  - Students know the purpose of assessments: Some are used for feedback and coaching purposes (formative assessments); some are used for rating learning for report cards (summative assessments).
  - A typical sequence is to teach; check for understanding of standards with formative or informal assessment; provide specific feedback for students; repeat these steps as appropriate; administer summative assessment. Recognizing that grades are important for a variety of reasons, emphasis is on feedback and learning rather than directly on grades.
  - Standards-Based Learning helps to keep the focus on learning as well as grades because descriptions of learning are in the report card standards and rubrics.

This is a work in progress as we learn more about our standards and how to best assess them. This is difficult work and work we know is in the best interest of our students and their learning over time.