

# Handbook

## Standards-Based Education



### Our Approach

Grades need to be meaningful and accurate. Research supports aligning grading and reporting to standards. The purpose of standards-based grading is to improve student achievement on the essential standards. This measures the mastery of the learning

targets and understanding the standards. As we are basing students' grades on standards for each discipline, final grades are first and foremost determined by our teacher's professional opinion of your child's work against those standards. Teachers use evidence of student learning using a variety of methods. Please don't hesitate to inquire how grades for your student were determined if you are unsure.

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## **Standards-Based Grading**

Standards-based grading measures the mastery of the learning objectives, or how well students understand the material in class. It is based on a specific set of standards that students need to meet for each grade/content level. Marks are not a comparison of one student to another, but rather a way to measure how well students are doing on grade-level/course level standards. A standards-based approach allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected of students and how to help them be successful in their educational program.

### **The Goal of Standards-Based Grading**

The primary goal of standards-based grading is to improve student achievement by focusing instruction and the alignment of curriculum with the essential standards. Standards-based grading and reporting will provide better communication to students, parents, teachers and administrators on what each student knows and is able to do according to the identified standards.

### **Standards-Based Grading at MMS**

The goal of Milan Middle School is to improve student learning by reporting grades that are accurate, consistent, meaningful, and supportive of learning, and the shift to standards-based learning is an effort to reach that goal. Here is how standards-based education addresses each of those four criteria.

Accurate: By basing a student's grade solely on academic factors, the teacher creates a clear picture of what the student has learned without the influence of other factors. These other factors, such as effort and attitude, are still essential, but are not part of the student's academic grade and are communicated separately.

Consistent: For each unit, the teacher will provide a rubric that describes exactly what the student will need to master. The rubrics establish clear expectations for mastery at the beginning of a unit and are referenced consistently throughout the unit and semester.

Meaningful: A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates what learning has taken place. In a standards-based classroom, scores are recorded by the essential outcomes rather than by type, such as tests or homework, making it easier to identify areas of strength and to address areas of concern for each student.

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Supportive of Learning: This approach supports learning by focusing on the material that has or has not been learned rather than on accumulating points to reach a certain total. The reassessment policy also supports student learning by allowing new levels of learning to replace old when a student shows improvement on an outcome.

## **Building Grading Practices**

### **Guidelines**

Grades will be based on proficiency scales which are connected to prioritized standards. Entries in the grade book that count towards the final grade will be limited to course or grade level standards.

1. Extra credit will not be given at any time.
2. Reassessment opportunities are important for all students. Students will be allowed multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of classroom standards in various ways. Retakes and revisions will be allowed.
3. Teachers will determine grade book entries by considering multiple points of data emphasizing the most recent data and providing evidence to support their determination.
4. Students will be provided multiple opportunities to practice standards independently through homework or other class work. Practice assignments and activities will be consistent with classroom standards for the purpose of providing feedback. Practice assignments, including homework, will not be included as part of the final grade.
5. Increased grading consistency schoolwide is important. Students work will be graded on a 4 point scale. Rubrics are used to assess learning on that scale.

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## Grading Calculations

Report cards are mailed home at the end of semester one and the end of the year. All grades are available through Power School. If you need access to PowerSchool or a password, please contact the office. Please start with the classroom teacher when you have questions or concerns about a grade. The middle school years are a great age to encourage and support your student to advocate when he or she is uncertain or has a concern about his or her grade.

As we are basing students' grades on standards for each discipline, final grades are first and foremost determined by our teacher's professional opinion of your child's work against those standards. Teachers use evidence of student learning with a variety of methods. Please don't hesitate to inquire how grades for your student were determined if you are unsure.

We use a 4 point system. Here is the grade equivalent for that scale that best translates to secondary grading practices and expectations.

4.00	A+
3.50-3.99	A
3.25-3.49	B+
3.00-3.24	B
2.75-2.99	C+
2.50-2.74	C
2.25-2.49	D+
2.00-2.24	D
0.00-1.99	F

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### **Traditional vs. Standards-Based Grading**

Standards-based grading informs us what students have actually learned and know. Standards-based grading measures students' knowledge of grade-level content over time by reporting the most recent, consistent level of performance. A formative assessment which shows that a student has not reached proficiency in a standard does not indicate an area of concern. Students are not expected to know the content until it has been taught to them. As teaching occurs, they will learn and should demonstrate proficient performance by the end of the grading period. In traditional grading, the student's performance for the whole grading period would be averaged and early quiz scores that were low would be averaged together with proficient performance later in the course resulting in a lower grade. In standards-based grading, a student who reaches proficiency would be reported proficient and the grade would reflect current performance level. In standards-based grading, factors like attendance, effort, work habits, and attitude will be reported separately in order to give a more accurate report of student progress.

Standards-based grading "involves measuring students' proficiency on well-defined course objectives." (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). (Note: *Standards-based reporting* involves reporting these course objectives rather than letter grades at the end of each grading/reporting period.)

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The visual below compares traditional grading with standards-based grading practices.

<b>Traditional Grading System</b>	<b>Standards-Based Grading System</b>
Based on assessment methods (quizzes, tests, homework, projects, etc.). One grade/entry is given per assessment.	Based on learning goals and performance standards. One summative grade/entry is given per learning goal.
Assessments are based on a percentage system. Criteria for success may be unclear.	Standards are criterion or proficiency-based. Criteria and targets are made available to students ahead of time.
Use an uncertain mix of assessment, achievement, effort, and behavior to determine the final grade. May use late penalties and extra credit.	Measures achievement only OR separates achievement from effort/behavior. No penalties or extra credit given.
Everything goes in the grade book – regardless of purpose.	Selected assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.) are used for grading purposes. Practice is reported but not counted in final grade.
Include every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average – not the best – work.	Emphasize the most recent evidence of learning when grading.

Adapted from O'Connor K (2002). *How to Grade for Learning: Linking grades to standards* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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## Grading and Assessment Definitions

**Assessment:** Gathering and interpreting information about student achievement using a variety of tools

**Common Assessment:** The same assessment that is given and graded by common grade level/subject classrooms at about the same time to collect data

**Formative Assessment:** Periodic assessment tool for learning that is used to adjust instruction for individual students or a whole class

**Grade:** A simple, clear, and concrete summary representation of student achievement based on what a student knows at the end of a given time period; the number (or letter) reported at the end of a period of time as a summary statement of student performance

**Learning Target:** A broken down objective of what the student should learn, understand, and/or be able to do; the individual learning skills for teaching and/or testing

**Mastery:** Demonstration of student performance against standard criteria at a pre-established level

**Power Standard:** Statement that describes what and/or how well students are expected to understand and perform

**Standards-based Grading:** Achievement level based on mastery of essential standards—a grading system where scores denote progress toward the understanding of a specific standard

**Summative Assessment:** An evaluation tool designed to show information about a student's achievement at the end of a period of instruction

**4.0 Rubric:** A grading tool used to provide feedback on an identified learning goal; the score signifies the knowledge a student has towards that learning goal

### Standards-Based Education Rubric Explanation

A rubric is given to the students for each essential outcome covered in each class. Each of the levels builds on the others and explains what learning the students have to demonstrate in order to earn that score. The students must master each level as they move up the rubric.



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## Questions and Answers

### **Everyone knows what an A-B-C-D-F and 100 point scale stands for. Why change?**

Traditional grading often measures many different factors and compares how well students do compared to their classmates. Standards-based grading measures how well an individual student is doing in relation to the grade level standard/ skill, not the work of other students. In the 100 point system, the question becomes “100 percent of what?” We need criteria to have more consistency and accuracy about what students know and are able to do. When a percentage system is applied, it can be misleading. 100 percent correctness on a set of very easy questions is very different than a slightly lower percentage on a set of difficult items. A 100 point scale does not consider difficulty of work and leads to an inaccurate measure of student learning relative to a specific learning goals. Grades must be accurate and consistent to be useful. The use of a grading scale that is unequal, such as the 100 point scale, distorts the final grade as a true indicator of mastery. The smaller equal interval scale will cause grading practices to be more accurate and consistent.

### **What is the effect on the GPA?**

Standards-based grading will have no effect on GPA. At the high school level, the 4.0 scale will be converted to a letter grade which is used to determine GPA. Teachers carefully consider the following in determining progress: independent daily written or oral tasks, application of skills, periodic assessments (quizzes, tests), performance tasks, and teacher-student questioning. Several different types of assessments will be available. Students can retest as many times as they need to, to show they know the concept or skill. Consistent descriptive feedback will be given to let students know what improvements are needed and what they are doing right. The information that provides the most accurate depiction of students’ learning is the most current information. If students demonstrate that past assessment information no longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information.

### **Why is averaging scores to determine a grade not the best method?**

Averaging does not always provide an accurate description of what students have learned. Teachers must consider other central tendencies such as median, mode, or new learning replacing old.

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### What about extra credit?

Extra credit does not measure learning. In a standards-based system, students are actually able to demonstrate their learning in many different ways and timeframes. In a traditional system in which points determine everything, extra credit and extra points will influence a grade and not reflect any additional learning. For instance, a student that has a 2.0 on a specific learning goal may have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning at the 3.0 level. However, in a traditional system in which extra points are simply added into the overall grade, extra points can be earned regardless of whether or not learning may have occurred.

### How can students improve their grades?

The goal in a standards-based class is to ensure that students master the essential outcomes for the class, so any efforts to raise a student's grade will have the same goal. The student should meet with the teacher to determine which outcomes need improvement and create a plan on how to relearn the material and when to be reassessed. If the student demonstrates a higher level of mastery on the outcome assessment, then the newer score will replace the older score. Again, the focus is to improve the student's mastery of the material, so extra credit points are not used in standards-based classes. Teachers have a [reassessment form](#) that must be completed to reassess on a standard.

### How are students held accountable for their effort and conduct?

These factors have always been and will continue to be an important part of every student's success. However, in standards-based education, these factors will be communicated separately from the student's academic grade. Students will also be rated on life skills: being prepared, completing work, and staying on task.

Life Skill/Rating	Unsatisfactory	Below Expectations	Meets Expectations	Outstanding
Comes Prepared	1	2	3	4
Completes Work	1	2	3	4
Stays on Task	1	2	3	4

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### **How are students held accountable for homework or classwork when it's only counted as practice?**

Many students feel that in a standards-based class they don't have to worry about anything except their final chapter or unit test. This is incorrect. It is important for students to understand that their teacher is evaluating their performance on learning tasks, or homework, each day. Teachers analyze student work to determine growth and improvement towards mastery of a specific skill or content. When assigning a final score, every teacher has the responsibility of taking into account all the work a student does during a semester. So, if a student chooses not to do an assignment, not only is he/she missing an opportunity to practice a skill, he/she also misses an opportunity to display mastery of an outcome to his/her teacher.

### **What research has the district used in developing standards-based assessment and grading ?**

The district has utilized research from the following experts in the field: Dr. Robert Marzano, Ken O'Connor, Jay McTighe, Rick Wormeli, Thomas Guskey, Douglas Reeves, and Rick Stiggins.

### **What does the number scale on the rubric mean?**

Once the teacher has determined what constitutes proficiency for the items on the rubric, the structure of the rubric determines how a score is assigned. Each level on the rubric has a specific meaning as follows:

4 (Advanced)– The student demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the material by completing advanced applications of the material.

3 (Proficient) – The student demonstrates proficiency on the complex, targeted knowledge and skills for the class.

2 (Partially Proficient)– The student understands the foundational material, but is still working to master application of the concepts and skills

1 (Not Proficient)– The student is able to demonstrate an understanding of all of the foundational material with support

0 (No Evidence)– Even with assistance from the teacher, the student shows no understanding of the material.

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Half point scores indicate student achievement that is partially demonstrated at the next highest level.

**As a parent, what can I do to support my student and help with his or her grade(s)?**

The teachers at MMS have several extra supports in place accessible for parents. If you cannot access this information online, please contact the teacher or office.

- Always reach out to the teacher if you have a concern.
- Use the online weekly planner to know what assignments are due.
- PowerSchool access will give you your child's most recent status.
- Read the newsletters for updates and rubrics.
- Make sure you are signed up to receive School Messenger.
- Encourage your child to do the reassessment tickets to be reevaluated on the material.

Resources:

Heflebower, T., Hoegh, J.K., and Warrick, P. (2014). A School Leader's Guide to Standards-Based Grading: Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

Marzano, R. J. (2010). Formative assessment & standards-based grading: Classroom strategies that work. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

Marzano, R. J. (2000). Transforming classroom grading. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wormeli, R. (2013). NASSP Presentation:

[http://swcontent.spokaneschools.org/cms/lib/WA01000970/Centricity/Domain/1752/Wormeli\\_slides\\_BW.pdf](http://swcontent.spokaneschools.org/cms/lib/WA01000970/Centricity/Domain/1752/Wormeli_slides_BW.pdf)