



**DIOCESE OF  
SAN JOSE**

# **Standard Based Grading and Reporting**

## **Overview**

Inspired by our faith and guided by the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS), the Catholic schools in the Diocese of San José are committed to excellence in educating the whole child. Our schools provide a rigorous academic program to prepare students for high school and college while also preparing them 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 they encounter. To this end, our principals and teachers collaborate weekly in professional learning communities as they seek to continually strengthen the support for every student.

For over two decades, our schools have based their instructional programs on rigorous content standards and clearly defined expectations of what students need to know and be able to do in each subject to be ready for the next grade level. Over a decade ago, the Diocese of San José adopted standards-based report cards in grades TK-5 to provide parents and students with feedback on these standards. Standards-based report cards provide specific information regarding both academic skills and lifelong learning skills that are critical to the learning process. These reports identify the standards a student can perform independently and those where a student needs additional support.

We have witnessed many benefits of these reports for students over the last ten years, and we have also recognized the need to revise the reports for greater clarity. For the past year, principals and teachers from across the Diocese have come together to design the revisions. The updated TK-5 standards-based report card will be implemented in the 2023-2024 school year. In addition, schools will provide parent support for using the updated report throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

During this process, it became apparent that receiving feedback similar to the revised TK-5 standards-based report cards would greatly benefit all students. Thus, 6-8 grade standards-based report cards will also be available for implementation beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. The timeline for middle school implementation will be specific to the local school with the goal of full implementation across the Diocese by the 2024-2025 school year.

While standards-based report cards are not new to our Diocese or educational research, we recognize that several questions may arise. Please see the following FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) below. Please also connect with your principal regarding the implementation at your school.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## **1 WHAT ARE CONTENT STANDARDS?**

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Content standards (commonly referred to as "standards") outline what students need to know and be able to do in each subject to be ready for the next grade level. They promote academic rigor, critical thinking, and application to real-world contexts. Standards are the foundation of a school's academic program, providing clarity and focus to the curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

The Diocese of San José elementary schools, together with the other (arch)dioceses in California, utilize the *Common Core State Standards* for English Language Arts and Mathematics, the *Next Generation Science Standards* for Science, the *California History/Social Science Standards* for Social Studies, and the *Diocesan Standards* for Religion.

Per the National Standards and Benchmarks for Catholic Schools (NSBECS), all content standards in Catholic schools are taught through a Catholic worldview, fostering "the desire to seek wisdom and truth, the preference for social justice, the discipline to become self-learners, the capacity to recognize ethical and moral grounding for behavior, and the responsibility to transform and enrich the world with Gospel values" (Miller, 2006; NSBECS, 2012).

## **2 WHAT IS STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING?**

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The purpose of standards-based grading and reporting is to support high levels of student achievement by clearly identifying and communicating student progress toward targeted learning goals in an accurate, specific manner. Progress is reported for each separate standard using specific evidence of learning with the goal of reaching mastery (i.e., performing the standard independently).

Standards-based grading and reporting emphasize both academic learning (standards) and lifelong learning skills (work habits and behavior). To ensure clarity, standards-based grading separately communicates progress toward each.

## **3 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING?**

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Twenty years of educational research and evidence affirm key benefits of standards-based grading for students, including:

- Focuses student attention on learning (rather than point acquisition)
- Provides specific, accurate feedback
- Informs individualized learning, including support as well as enrichment opportunities
- Emphasizes the importance of work habits
- Increases student ownership over learning
- Increases student motivation for learning
- Reduces student anxiety
- Fosters the skills needed for the future (high school, college, and profession)

## **4 HOW IS A STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARD DIFFERENT FROM A TRADITIONAL REPORT CARD?**

A traditional report card provides information regarding a student's overall performance using one letter for each subject (A, B, C, D, F). Most often, the letter corresponds to a percentage on a 100-point scale calculated by averaging performance over time on multiple assessments and tasks covering different topics.

A standards-based report card provides specific information regarding a student's level of mastery of each content standard (most often using a 4-point rubric) as well as progress toward lifelong learning skills. It provides a more accurate, detailed picture of student achievement. Parents and students can clearly see which standards have been mastered and which ones still need practice (or further opportunity for enrichment). With standards-based reporting, conversations between teachers and students focus on what learning still needs to happen versus how to get the points necessary to reach an A. As a result, students are more likely to attain the necessary skills to be successful at the next grade level.

Traditional Grading Systems	Standards-based Grading Systems
General feedback	Specific feedback
Grades reflect a student's overall performance using one letter for each subject (A, B, C, D, F).	Grades reflect a student's level of mastery of each specific content standard.
Grades are based on a percentage system with failure (0-59) having a disproportionate effect on the grade.	Grades are based on a rubric system with typically four distinct levels of mastery.
Criteria for success are often unclear.	Criteria for success are clearly identified.
Academic achievement, effort, work habits, behavior, & participation are often combined within a single grade.	Academic achievement and work habits/behavior are reported separately for clarity.
The grade includes every score regardless of when it was collected.	The grade includes valid evidence of the most recent level of mastery for each content standard.

All assignments are included in the grade regardless of purpose.

Only those assignments which come at the end of the learning (summative) are included. Assignments, including homework, that are part of the learning process (formative) are used for practice and feedback to support learning.

Adapted from O'Connor, K. (2009)

## **5 HOW LONG HAS THE DIOCESE OF SAN JOSÉ USED STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORT CARDS?**

The Diocese of San José elementary schools have used standards-based grading and report cards in grades TK-5 for over ten years.

In addition, two of our elementary schools already used standards-based grading and report cards in grades 6-8 prior to the 2023-2024 school year.

## **6 HOW IS THE CURRENT STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARD BEING UPDATED?**

Over the last ten years, we have witnessed many benefits of standards-based grading and reporting for TK-5 students. Principals and teachers have also recognized the need to revise the reports for greater clarity. During the 2022-2023 school year, principals and teachers across the Diocese came together to design the revisions. The updated TK-5 standards-based report card will be implemented in the 2023-2024 school year.

The revisions include five key components:

<b>Component</b>	<b>Revision</b>
Standards	More specific list to provide more targeted feedback
Scale	1-4 scale with clarified descriptions
Lifelong Learning Skills	Incorporation of critical work habits and social-emotional skills
Individualization	Comment section available for each subject
Format	Clear organization and font to support readability

## **7 WHAT DOES THE UPDATED STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARD LOOK LIKE?**

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[A sample updated standards-based report card can be accessed here.](#)

## **8 HOW ARE STANDARDS-BASED LEVELS OF MASTERY DETERMINED?**

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Teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to determine a student's level of mastery of each standard, including traditional paper-and-pencil tests, written papers, performance assessments (projects where students apply the standards in a relevant context), verbal assessments, presentations, and teacher observations. Each assessment strategy is intended to provide the teacher with specific evidence of student learning. When a student does not initially demonstrate mastery, targeted supports and reassessment are provided to ensure the student masters the critical skills needed to be ready for the next grade.

The standards-based report cards will utilize the following four levels of mastery for academic standards:

4	Standard Exceeded	Demonstrates independent mastery at a depth or complexity greater than what is required by the standard
3	Standard Met	Demonstrates independent mastery of all components of the standard
2	Standard Partially Met	Demonstrates independent mastery of some components of the standard
1	Standard Not Yet Met	Cannot yet demonstrate independent mastery of the standard without assistance

## **9 WHO WAS INVOLVED IN DESIGNING THE UPDATED STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARD?**

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For the past year, principals and teachers from elementary schools across the Diocese have come together to design the revisions. Over 90 teachers organized into four committees clarified the content standards for each subject, recommended clarifications to the rubric scale, and designed key features of the format. All school faculties were asked for recommendations for lifelong learning skills to be listed on the report card, and all principals collaborated on the final decisions, including the implementation timeline and the supports. During the 2023-2024 school year, we will seek input from principals, teachers, and parents to further strengthen the report for clarity and usability.

## **10 WHY IS STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING BEING EXPANDED INTO GRADES 6-8?**

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Due to the significant benefits of standards-based grading for student learning, standards-based report cards will be available for implementation in grades 6-8 beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. The timeline for middle school implementation will be specific to the local school with the goal of full implementation across the Diocese by the 2024-2025 school year. Please speak with your principal regarding the implementation for your school.

During this implementation, the high quality and rigor of instruction are not changing. Instead, the report card will now provide a more accurate, detailed picture of student achievement. Parents and students can clearly see which standards have been mastered and which ones still need practice (or an opportunity for enrichment). With standards-based grading and report cards, conversations between teachers and students focus on what learning still needs to happen rather than how to get the points necessary to reach an A. As a result, students are more likely to attain all the necessary skills to be successful at the next grade level.

## **11 HOW DO STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS IMPACT THE HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS PROCESS?**

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The Department of Catholic Schools and the area Catholic high schools have been in communication about the transition. High school admissions directors and departments are well-versed in multiple report card formats, including standards-based grading. The admissions departments combine report card information with additional data points (such as recommendation letters, entrance exams, and standardized test scores) to determine admission eligibility with the goal of ensuring students can be successful in their educational environments.

Identifying one's strengths and areas of growth as a learner, being self-motivated to meet course objectives, developing strong work habits, and mastering grade-level standards are all aspects of a standards-based grading system that will help students succeed in high school.

Universities and colleges also accept standards-based reporting as a valid and reliable measure for admissions. Recently, over 70 colleges and universities, including Harvard and Dartmouth, signed formal statements affirming that standards-based grading (also known as proficiency-based education) will not negatively impact the admissions process (McKenna, 2018).

## **12 WILL STUDENTS GRADUATING 8TH GRADE WITH A STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING SYSTEM BE PREPARED FOR A HIGH SCHOOL THAT USES A TRADITIONAL GRADING SYSTEM?**

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Students who meet grade-level content standards in grades 6-8 and practice developing lifelong learning skills foster the essential skills necessary to perform well in high school. The grades that students receive in high school will depend upon the degree to which they meet their teachers' communicated expectations.

*"As far as preparing students for 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 learn excellently what that curriculum includes. A standards-based report card identifies the specific learning goals within the curriculum to*



*ensure appropriate rigor. 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).*

### **13 ARE TEACHERS RECEIVING TRAINING PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION?**

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Diocesan and school collaboration and professional development have focused on standards, standards-based grading, and reporting throughout 2022-2023 and will continue through 2023-2024. In addition, our TK-5 teachers have been utilizing standards-based report cards for many years.

### **14 WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING?**

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Those interested in the 20 years of research and practice related to standards-based grading are invited to read books and articles written by Tom Guskey, Carol Dweck, Doug Reeves, John Hattie, Robert Marzano, Joe Feldman, Susan Brookhart, Grant Wiggins, Tom Schimmer, and Ken O'Connor.

### **15 WILL STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING LOWER THE RIGOR OF INSTRUCTION?**

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No. For over two decades, our schools have based their instructional programs on rigorous content standards and clearly defined expectations of what students need to know and be able to do in each subject to be ready for the next grade level. These standards promote academic rigor, critical thinking, and application to real-world contexts. Standards-based grading and report cards are a more precise way to measure and communicate student mastery of these standards and the lifelong learning skills critical to the learning process.

## **16 IS BASING GRADES ON STANDARDS SUBJECTIVE?**

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Using standards-based grading to determine and communicate student progress reduces subjectivity by utilizing clearly defined learning standards for each subject and specific criteria to determine distinct levels of mastery.

## **17 HOW DOES STANDARDS-BASED GRADING AND REPORTING AFFECT STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES?**

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Standards-based grading is designed to support all students by outlining clear learning goals (standards) and communicating progress toward the goals. For a student with learning differences, school leadership, teachers, and parents partner to develop a school-specific student support plan that outlines and monitors the effectiveness of instructional strategies to meet the student's individual needs.

## **18 WHAT CAN A STUDENT DO TO IMPROVE THEIR LEVEL OF MASTERY OF A STANDARD?**

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The goal is for all students to attain mastery of all the content standards. The grade on a standards-based report card reflects a specific level of mastery. To improve their level of mastery, students can partner with the teacher for targeted support, engage in additional practice, and arrange a time for reassessment once the standard has been mastered.

## **19 HOW CAN MY CHILD EXCEED A STANDARD?**

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Exceeding the standard means to demonstrate mastery at a depth or complexity greater than what is required by the standard. Exceeding is not the equivalent of an A on a traditional report card. For example, if a fifth-grade student received A's on every math test during the trimester, he or she would likely receive an A on a traditional report card. If those math tests measured only the concepts fifth graders are expected to master (i.e., the standards), those A's would be

the equivalent of meeting the standard on a standards-based report card; the student is doing what he or she should be doing very well at this grade level but not necessarily more.

Standards-based grading provides an opportunity to determine whether a student is demonstrating mastery at a depth or complexity greater than what is required by the standard. This may include making deeper connections, more specific explanations, or more complex applications.

It is important to note that not every standard can be exceeded. For example, if the standard were to identify all 26 letters of the alphabet, identifying all 26 letters would meet the standard. Additional letters do not exist to provide an opportunity to exceed the standard.

## **20 WHY ARE SKILLS SUCH AS HOMEWORK COMPLETION, EFFORT, AND ORGANIZATION NOT INCLUDED IN THE ACADEMIC GRADE?**

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Grades are a way of communicating what a student knows and is able to do. When we include work habits and behaviors, we are not accurately communicating achievement. Attendance, work habits, and behavior are critical areas. Reporting these areas separately in the lifelong learning skills section of the report card gives a clearer picture of student performance, including specific areas for growth.

## **21 WHAT ARE LIFELONG LEARNING SKILLS?**

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At its heart, Catholic education is holistic with a deep belief in whole child formation. As a result, it is critical that our report cards reflect not only an accurate representation of academic learning but also key aspects of whole child development.

In determining lifelong skills for the report card, CASEL's Social Emotional Learning Framework was used as a guide. The 5 components of the framework include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

## **22 HOW DO I ENSURE MY STUDENT UNDERSTANDS HOMEWORK'S IMPORTANCE IF IT ISN'T INCLUDED IN THE ACADEMIC GRADE?**

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Homework (as well as classwork) is practice, and practice is an extremely important and valuable lifelong learning skill as it supports the learning process and prepares a student to perform an academic standard independently. The academic grade reflects a student's ability to perform each standard independently based on evidence from a summative assessment. The ability to practice well (i.e., complete homework and classwork to strengthen mastery) is reported separately in the lifelong learning skills section.