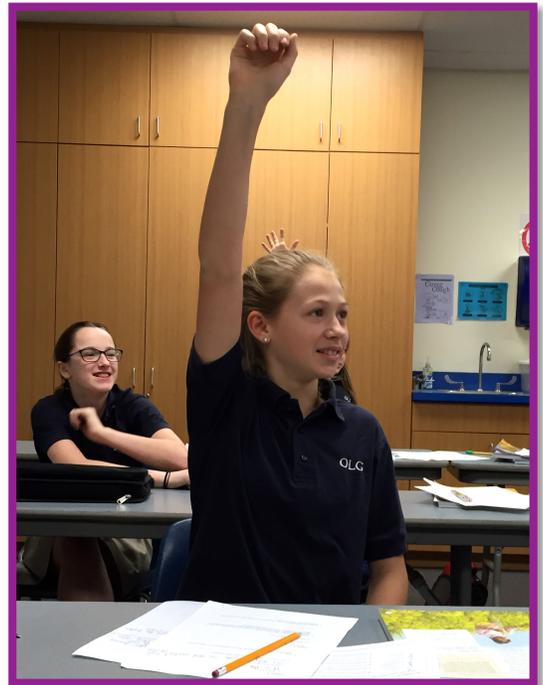


Standards-Based Grading at Our Lady of Grace Catholic School: *A Focus on Learning*



Frequently Asked Questions
A Standards-based Grading and Reporting System
Our Lady of Grace Catholic School

The mission of Our Lady of Grace Catholic School calls us to “assess the individual needs of each child and encourage the pursuit of academic excellence,” while helping our students learn to their greatest potential and become life-long learners. In order to better achieve this mission, Our Lady of Grace plans to improve the information and feedback provided for each student and their parents through a standards-based grading and reporting system beginning with grades K-6 in the 2016-2017 school year. This standards-based system will empower students to take a more active role in their learning and change the focus from traditional letter grades to academic mastery and learning.



1. What is standards-based grading and reporting?

Standards-based grading is a reporting system that provides scores by standards, not summarized into one score or traditional letter grade. We have been aligning our work to standards for several years and the curriculum will continue to be rigorous and standards-based. The curriculum will not change. You will now get better information. Standards-based learning is not a program. It is a way of more clearly communicating achievement. You will also get better information on learning behaviors that in a traditional system are calculated as a part of a letter grade.

2. Why standards-based grading and reporting?

Several years ago, our teachers began researching and learning about best practices in assessment, grading and reporting grades. This began as the Archdiocese asked the Catholic grade schools to develop a standards-based grading system in their schools. Through this research, we have learned that:

1. **Feedback:** Standards-based grading provides more consistent, concrete, specific and authentic feedback about progress toward academic standards. Achievement toward academic standards and student learning behaviors are reported separately for a clear picture of each student.
2. **Clear Expectations:** This system will allow students to be more aware of what is expected of them. It will provide families with a more detailed outline of the expectations in each of the academic areas.

3. **Accurate Assessment:** Students are assessed on their mastery of academic standards. This is ultimately reported as a function of their most recent and relevant work in a unit or trimester and not as an average of all of their learning over time.
 4. **Ensuring Mastery and Going Beyond:** This system helps ensure student mastery of grade-level standards and provides new opportunities to challenge students to go above and beyond.
3. **How does a system based on Meeting, Exceeding, Partially Meeting and Not Meeting work?**

The Standards-Based Grading system of Meets, Exceeds, Partially Meets and Does Not Meet does not translate to a traditional A-F scale. Students are given expectations of how to Meet and Exceed a standard before completing an assignment or assessment. In some areas, a Meets will be the highest

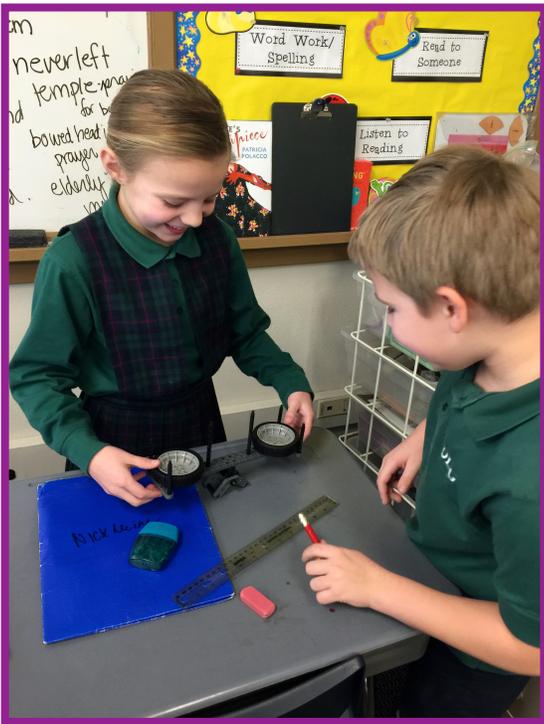
score possible. If this is the case, students will be given this information.

Exceeding the Standard: Exceeds the grade level standard. Demonstrates a deeper level of knowledge, understanding and overall application of the standard. Independently applies learning in other contexts.

Meeting the Standard: Meets the grade level standard. Demonstrates consistent knowledge and understanding. The student, with limited errors, grasps and applies key concepts, processes, and skills for the grade level.

Partially Meets the Standard: Demonstrates progress toward the grade level standard, but has not yet achieved it. Demonstrates some knowledge and understanding.

Does Not Meet Standard: Shows no or minimal progress toward the grade level standard. Additional support is needed to develop knowledge and understanding.



4. **What will be graded in this new system?**

All assignments and assessments that a student completes will continue to be very important in the learning process. All student work (classwork, homework, quizzes, tests, projects, in class discussions, etc) will help inform the teacher of a student's level of mastery regarding each reporting or power standard. Work will be more purposeful and will be correlated to learning targets with clear criteria of how to meet and exceed expectations. While all the work is important and will inform the final grade, the majority of the final grade emphasis for each standard will be on summative assessments. Here is a description of summative and formative assessments.

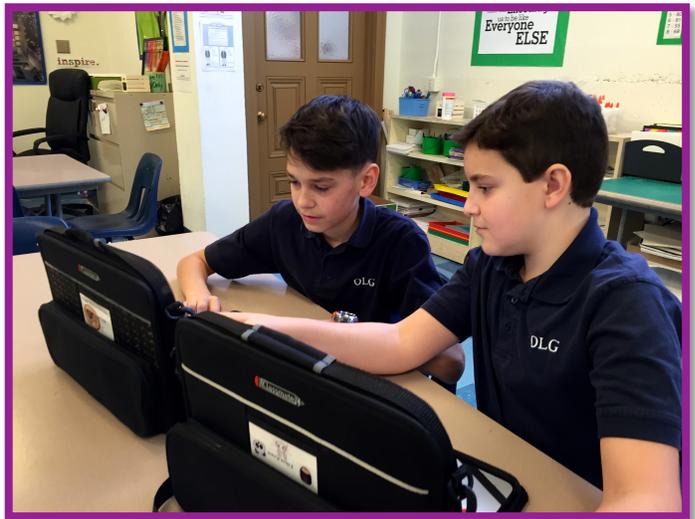
Summative Assessments: Summative assessments are designed as a final evaluation of student learning. Examples include tests, projects, or

demonstrations. Students will receive scores by each standard that reflect their level of mastery in regards to the content or skills assessed.

Formative Assessment: Formative assessments occur during the learning process in order to modify teaching and provide academic support. Formative assessments are designed to provide practice and guide next-steps in teaching and learning. Examples include homework, daily quizzes or inquiry activities. Students will receive descriptive feedback by learning target or standard that reflects their progress toward mastering content or skills during the course of instruction. Students will act on revising and improving their work based on this feedback.

5. Will there be additional opportunities to demonstrate mastery?

Yes. A student at the intermediate and middle school level (grades 4-8) may choose to retake an assessment in order to demonstrate mastery that was not achieved on the original test. In order to have the opportunity to retake a test, a student must first complete a "Retake Ticket" within one week of receiving their original test. On the ticket they will convey to the teacher why they believe they did not achieve mastery of the subject and more importantly how they are going to prepare differently for the retake. The completed ticket will give the teacher the opportunity to assess the following:



- Is more instruction needed in order for the student to be successful?
- Does the student have a good plan for success?
- Can the teacher make any retake preparation suggestions?
- Does the student have all of their homework completed that is associated with the test? If not, missing homework may need to be completed before a retake is given.
- Does the student have all the necessary study materials?
- Is the student abusing the retake system and therefore should not be allowed to take the retake test?

All retake tickets must be signed and approved by a parent or guardian. We view the retake process as an agreement between student, teacher and parent. If a parent does not feel that a retake is appropriate for their child or feels their child is abusing the retake system, they do not have to sign the ticket, and therefore no retake will be given to that student. In some cases, teachers, students and parents may feel that students will still benefit from

additional opportunities to learn and then re-assess. This conversation can be initiated by the student, parent or teacher. Teachers will monitor the impact of this retake practice on student motivation and engagement to ensure students are not using the system in a way that is not focused on learning.

6. What does a student report card look like in Standards-Based Grading?

There are two parts on the standards-based report card: Academic Reporting Standards and Learning Behaviors. Reporting standards are also referred to as Power Standards. Below is an example of Middle School Writing and Literature sections of the report card. Students will receive a Meets, Exceeds, Partially Meets or Does Not Meet for each reporting standard. If there is a standard not being assessed a specific trimester the report card space will be shaded. For each learning behavior (noted by the *), students will receive a 4 (Consistently), 3 (Frequently), 2 (Sometimes) or 1 (Rarely).

Writing (Teacher Name)	T1	T2	T3	
Writes effectively in a variety of forms and time frames				Academic Reporting Standards
Communicates ideas/questions clearly and effectively in responses, oral presentations				
Uses proper grammar, mechanics, and spelling				
Properly incorporates and cites sources				
* Follows directions and expectations of class				Learning Behaviors
* Actively and appropriately participates in class				
* Responsible for quality, timely work				
* Demonstrates respectful behavior				
Literature (Teacher Name)	T1	T2	T3	
Comprehends a variety of grade level texts (fiction and non-fiction)				Academic Reporting Standards
Analyzes, interprets, and responds to literature				
Understands basic literary and story elements				
Utilizes context to interpret words and phrases to build vocabulary				
* Follows directions and expectations of class				Learning Behaviors
* Actively and appropriately participates in class				
* Responsible for quality, timely work				
* Demonstrates respectful behavior				

7. How can parents help their children?

- Praise them for the areas they are doing well, using specific language or evidence from the cover sheets that show their work connected to learning (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperely, 2007)
- Praise them for the effort they make in revising and fixing their work.
- Work with them on the areas they are not yet meeting-- homework and projects and assignments will clearly indicate the areas that need work or areas to help your child take their work a step further.
- Engage them in deeper discussions about how you apply these concepts and see them being used in the world. This is one example of how students will be achieving an exceeds.
- Every learner is different. Depending on the child and the subject, you should not expect an exceeds, or possibly a meets, every time and right



away from your child. The goal is to support each child to achieve the best of their ability. While all children will be given an opportunity and encouragement by teachers to engage in work that will allow them to demonstrate an exceeds, this score is reserved for student work that shows deep understanding, application, synthesis of concepts in new settings or ways they connect the ideas to other situations. The exceeds

descriptions will provide ample direction for helping students generate work at this level. Students who were motivated by grades will now be motivated to get an exceeds and they will have a clearer way of doing it versus just doing “more” work, they will now do work that demonstrates deeper understanding.

- Exceeds does not equal an A. While it is not comparable because an A as a certain quantity of points and an Exceeds or Meets is a description of achievement, the Exceeds in many cases goes beyond what was previously expected to get an A. Thus, the level of rigor is much clearer in this new system and much more aligned to the kinds of skills and understanding needed to be successful in the future.

8. Will my child still be motivated to work hard the entire trimester if what he or she demonstrates at the end of the trimester has the greatest impact on their grade?

Everything still matters. All assignments and formative assessments will be preparation for the summative assessments. Now, instead of students seeing a percentage, they will see and get feedback on their work in terms of learning. So, all of the assignments, homework and activities will be

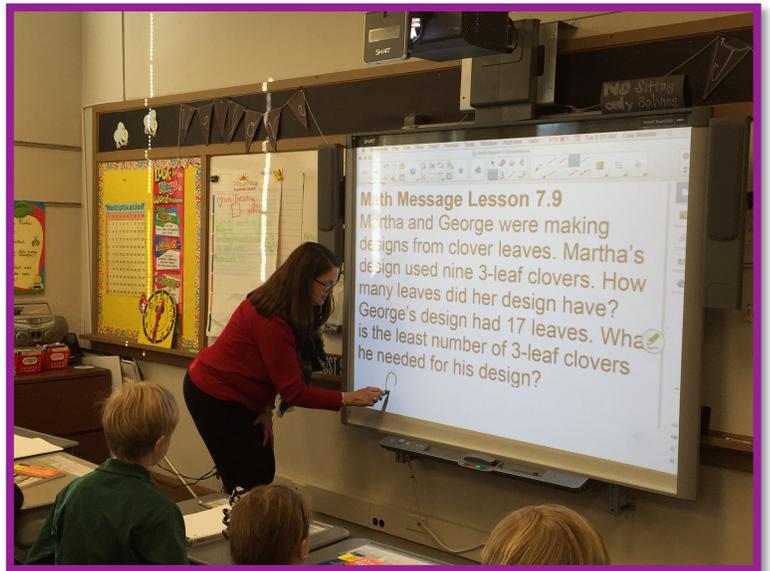
intentionally connected to learning. Students will be using their work to prepare to do well on tests, projects, and writing. Students will begin to see a tighter connection between the work they do and their achievement.

Evidence will be collected throughout the whole trimester. The most recent evidence demonstrating levels of achievement on each reporting standard will be reflected on the report card. In some cases, students may learn a standard early or in the middle of the Trimester and won't be revisited until the next Trimester. The report card is only a summative snapshot as part of the system.

Individual motivation issues may emerge in any school setting and will be addressed as needed.

9. I know all the strategies and tips to help my child get straight A's in school, what are the tricks to get an Exceeds?

The performance descriptions will provide the qualities of work and the type of evidence to achieve an exceeds. While it is not expected that students will achieve exceeds in all areas, these descriptions provide ways that students might generate or produce work to show deeper understanding.



This new system includes some of the old methods like helping your child with their questions and misunderstandings, ensuring that work is completed, helping students learn to study, helping and guiding your child to learn how to recognize mistakes and find strategies to take when they get stuck.

This new system provides opportunity to talk to your child about their work and the relevance and meaning of what their learning in terms of everyday life, application to authentic problem-solving issues, and connections to other related ideas and resources.

10. By essentially raising the grading level to include Exceeds, are we putting too much pressure on our children?

Exceeds describes a deeper level of understanding. It is not expected that students achieve at an Exceeds level in all areas nor is it advised to communicate that expectation to your children. This level is an exciting and important description as many students will now be able to see the application and connection to what they are learning at a deeper level. Students who achieve a standard level early on will have the next level to push to in a very focused and intentional way. In this new model, students will clearly see where they are in terms of learning and have specific information about how to get to the next level. This often reduces stress because there is a clearer path. However, we must always watch the impact of our practices on children. Reduce their stress by communicating in terms of learning and celebrating their achievement with references to specific learning descriptions and work. If students are experiencing additional pressure, communicate with the teacher to ensure that students are

supported. However, this is also a way to raise the bar for your child and require work at a more advanced level - both at school and at home.



11. What about the transition from standards-based reporting in middle school to traditional grading in high school? If a student receives mostly 3s (meets standards), what kind of 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 middle school and practice developing scholarly skills reflected by

the student attributes (such as taking responsibility and attention to detail), are likely 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.

12. How will this affect the high school they go to?

Our Lady of Grace has been in conversation with local high schools and they assured us that current letter grades are not the best indicator of success when moving into high school. Most high schools view elementary letter grades as unreliable because they are based on a myriad of factors and do not

provide detail of specific learning achievement. In all cases, the high schools had no concerns about standards-based reporting. High schools have indicated that students coming from a standards-based system, focused on instilling learning, will have an easier transition. Students who achieve at standard or exceeding levels will be better prepared for the rigor that high school demands. Too often students do not understand how that “A” was earned and as a result do not learn how to persist. Focused feedback on their achievement and action on that feedback is what helps students learn and achieve at higher levels.

13. Why can't we report by both mastery of the standards and traditional grades?

Summarizing multiple essential standards into one score or traditional grade does not provide the clear communication that Our Lady of Grace is striving for and the research soundly promotes. Brookhart (2013) stated, after a review of grading research that asked the question “Is the traditional system of grading the most educationally useful system of evaluation?” (Kirschenbaum et al., 1971, p. 14 cited in Brookhart, 2013), that the conclusions have all been the same: “The best grading system was based on reporting student achievement of established standards” (p. 259). The reliability and validity of traditional grades has consistently been a concern. While in its infancy, standards-based grading is showing early signs to provide more valid information and growth in achievement (D’Agostino & Welsh, 2007; 2009).

When grades are present, students shift their focus to the points or the grade and the focus on learning is lost. Achievement or growth becomes secondary. Butler (1988) found that: 1) When descriptive comments were coupled with traditional grades, students paid more attention to the grades and there was no growth in achievement. 2) With just a traditional grade, again there was no growth in achievement. 3) It was with descriptive comments alone that students grew on average about 30%. Shifting to a communication method that provides more information on learning creates a system where students will be able to grow at higher rates.

There is no need to summarize with one traditional grade. This summary grade does not provide more information or even a sense of how students might earn grades in high school. Traditional grades are based on a combination of factors. Research shows that this combination of factors varies significantly by teacher (Brookhart, 2013). As a result, when students reach high school, they will need to figure out the grading theory and practice of the teachers with whom they interact regardless of which system they have in grade school.

Not only will this standards-based system provide students and families more information, it will now provide the teachers who will have incoming OLG students in their classrooms more targeted information.

14. GPA grading has been in place for decades, why are we changing something that works?

The GPA system is understood and so the assumption is that it works. The kinds of information colleges are using now goes far beyond a GPA because they can now see that it is only a very small part of the picture. The types of course work students take and the kinds of experiences students are having in classes have more to do with success than a GPA.

There are mixed reviews of GPA. Some colleges are putting less and less weight on a GPA and much more focus on the essay and courses achieved in high school. The reason is because there are so many different ways to calculate GPA that its meaning can be easily lost.

Some have found a link between higher GPA and college success. However, in whatever the reporting system used, students need to work hard and learn how to study and persist through difficult tasks that may or may not be clear. The transition to a focus on GPA happens differently for all students. The most important part of whether or not your college of choice considers GPA is understanding the learning expectations, engaging in the work, actively participating and engaging in the expectations and work set forth by teachers and revising and revisiting assignments whenever possible. When students learn these skills, the GPA transition will be smooth.

15. What will PowerSchool look like?

PowerSchool is one of the most commonly used platforms nationally for standards-based grading systems. Here is a sample gradebook demonstrating the academic standard along the top and the various levels of student achievement for each standard throughout the semester as exhibited in homework, quizzes and projects. Note that most homework and classwork assess multiple standards.

The screenshot shows the PowerTeacher Gradebook interface for Paul Smith at Apple Grove High School 2. The student profile for Avanesian, Adrineh is selected. The gradebook displays scores for 14 assignments across 11 standards. The standards are: Ability to Co... Elementary R... LTR, Demonstrate... Elementary R... LTR, Demonstrate... Elementary R... LTR, Develops Ha... Elementary R... LTR, Recognize P... Elementary R... LTR, Understands... Elementary R... LTR, Understands... Elementary R... LTR, Understands... Elementary R... LTR, Uses Techno... Elementary R... LTR, and Behaviors That... Null LTR. The final score for the most recent assignment is 3.

Assignment	Ability to Co... Elementary R... LTR	Demonstrate... Elementary R... LTR	Demonstrate... Elementary R... LTR	Develops Ha... Elementary R... LTR	Recognize P... Elementary R... LTR	Understands... Elementary R... LTR	Understands... Elementary R... LTR	Understands... Elementary R... LTR	Uses Techno... Elementary R... LTR	Behaviors That... Null LTR
Homework #1	1				2					
Group Project #1		2							4	
Quiz #1		2	2	2				3		
Homework #2		2		2						
Quiz #2		3		3		2				
Homework #3										
Homework #4	2		2			2				
Homework #5									2	
Homework #6		3		4		3	4			
Homework #7	2		2		3					
Homework #8										
Homework #9	3	3	2							
Homework #10	3		2			3				
Homework #11	3		3							
Final Score - most recent - 3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	4	

16. Will I still be able to see how many questions my child got wrong on quizzes and tests?

Yes. On summative and some formative assignments you will likely receive information about your child's progress in two ways. For the grades that use PowerSchool, you will no longer see just one score and percentage for each assignment. You will now see your child's level of mastery of each of the standards that assessment addressed.

You will also be receiving cover sheets and rubrics to review at home that break down assignments and tests into each standard addressed and describe your child's mastery level on each standard. In primary grades, tests are often sent home in addition to the cover sheet for parents to see. At the middle school level, those tests that are not sent home are kept in student files at school. Parents can access these to review by contacting the teacher.

17. What other local schools are using a standards-based reporting system?

The majority of local schools currently use a standards-based grading and reporting system for grades K-5 or K-6 already. Many of these schools are in the process of preparing the transition of their middle schools as well. This includes both public districts and many Catholic schools. Nationally, there are many successful models of standards-based grading that have been implemented at both the middle and high school levels during the last ten or more years.

All of the Wayzata Middle Schools will be transitioning to a standards-based grading system in Fall of 2016. Wayzata Information can be found here: <http://www.wayzata.k12.mn.us/gradingforlearning>

18. How will OLG measure the impact of the new grading and reporting system and ensure it is benefiting the students?

Our Lady of Grace has included in the most recent school strategic plan that it will continuously evaluate the implementation of standards-based grading. This will include gathering feedback from students, parents, teachers, high schools and alumni as well as continually comparing MAP and MCA testing data, including numbers of student achieving at the highest levels.

*Any research or citations mentioned in this document are available in the separate "Resources" document via the Our Lady of Grace Standards-Based Grading Page.

