



Helping Parents Understand Standards-Based Report Cards

In Libertyville School District 70, report cards are issued three times a year. If a student is having difficulty meeting established learning objectives, a progress report may also be sent home mid-trimester indicating areas in which he or she is experiencing difficulty. Libertyville School District 70 has established grade level learning objectives based upon state and national standards. The purpose of this report card is to communicate student progress toward achieving these end-of-year objectives. A standards-based report card:

- provides a clear message to parents about which skills and concepts students know and are able to demonstrate in relation to established state and national standards*
- helps teachers and students focus on identified end-of-year expectations from the very beginning of the year, giving students a direction for their learning*
- aligns instruction, assessment, and grading with standards*
- creates a higher level of consistency and continuity in assessing among teachers and across grade levels*

Why are we hearing so much about standards?

Teaching and learning should be aligned with state and national standards. Our curriculum (**what** we teach) is developed, and our textbooks and materials (what we **use** to teach) are purchased with standards as the guiding influence.

Success for schools in Illinois is determined by their students' performance on annual assessments (the ISAT for elementary/middle school and the PSAE for high schools). These "measures of success" are published annually in the School Report Card by the Illinois State Board of Education and include schools' and districts' progress toward achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). These assessments are based upon benchmarks established in the Illinois Learning Standards, which were developed by the Illinois State Board of Education. Recently, the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics were developed and adopted by 45 states across the United States, including Illinois.

What is a standards-based assessment?

Standards-based assessment is based on the belief that every child can learn given adequate instruction and opportunity for practice. It allows teachers to accurately communicate achievement of learning targets or benchmarks to students and parents, as well as providing information to plan for instruction.

State and national learning standards inform teachers, parents, and students what skills and content students should learn at varying points in their educational experience. Developing assessments and report cards based upon learning standards measures how well students are acquiring skills and knowledge relative to those established standards. Standards-based assessment is used to help every student understand where he or she is in relation to meeting standards so they can improve.

By aligning curriculum, assessment and student report cards to standards, teachers measure student learning against consistent, established criteria. This is different from traditional assessment and reporting, which gives a single letter or number grade for broad subject categories. A standards-based report card puts the emphasis on learning, rather than on a comparison between and among students.

What is the difference between traditional assessment and standards-based assessment?

Traditional assessment uses averaging of student work over time, and other student characteristics such as work habits, attendance, homework, and effort. Standards-based assessment focuses solely on a student's academic achievement and continued mounting evidence that indicates a true measure of the student's attainment of learning targets (such as the ability to write a paragraph, or add and subtract whole numbers). Extraneous factors like work habits, attendance, homework, and effort are assessed and reported separately.

In standards-based assessments, reporting is based more upon the progress toward mastery of learning targets or standards than "traditional" assessment. Subject areas are broken down further into big ideas and learning targets that students need to learn or master. Each target is assessed. Scores from activities that are provided solely for practice are not reflected. The influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning is reported separately from achievement, within "Characteristics of Successful Learners".

On traditional report cards, students receive one grade for reading, one for math, one for science and so on. On a standards-based report card, subjects are divided into a list of skills and knowledge that students are responsible for learning. Students receive a separate mark for each standard.

The marks on a standards-based report card are different from traditional letter grades. Letter grades are often calculated by combining how well the student met his/her particular teacher's expectations, how he/she performed on assignments and tests, and how much effort the teacher believes was put forth. Letter grades do not tell parents which skills their children have mastered or whether they are working below, at or above grade level.

Standards-based report cards will provide more consistency between teachers over the years than traditional report cards, because all students are evaluated on the same grade-appropriate skills. Parents can see exactly which learning objectives their child have mastered.

Do the performance descriptors on the report card correlate with letter grades?

No, the following performance descriptors are used to indicate a student's progress in meeting academic learning standards:

Extends

The student consistently demonstrates an understanding and application of skills and concepts beyond what was taught in class. The student may benefit from work that is differentiated or of greater rigor.

Meets

The student demonstrates consistent understanding and application of skills and concepts taught in class. The student is consistently on target for meeting established end-of-year, grade level learning objective. It is not anticipated that students will receive "Meets" in all areas of the report card as many skills and concepts are revisited over the course of a year to support consistent understanding and application.

Approaching

The student demonstrates partial understanding and application of skills and concepts taught in class. The student may require more exposure or practice to fully demonstrate consistent understanding and application. A mark of approaching is expected and often occurs when a new concept or skill is introduced.

Below

The student consistently requires assistance to demonstrate understanding and/or application of skills and concepts taught in class. The student may benefit from work that is adapted or from differentiated instruction in order to demonstrate better understanding or application of skills and concepts.

How does standards-based assessing effect student motivation?

When students can clearly see the learning goals/purpose for each activity and connect the outcome of those activities to actions that are within their control, motivation improves. In other words, when students can see that the level and amount of work they contribute to a learning activity is directly related to the outcome, they will be empowered and encouraged to work hard.

How does a standards-based report card improve teaching and learning?

Knowing where the students are in their progress toward meeting standards-based learning objectives is crucial for planning and carrying out classroom instruction. Teachers teach to the needs of each student. Standards-based assessment gives teachers more information about each student's progress in meeting the level of proficiency required by each standard. In addition, teachers share the standards with students and parents, helping them to better understand the learning that needs to take place.