



## *Monroe Township Public Schools*

# **Standards-Based Grading**

## *Teacher/Parent Guide*

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## **A message from Mr. Charles Earling, Superintendent of Monroe Township Public Schools:**

We are pleased to announce that for the 2012-2013 school year, we will continue to utilize standards-based grading. This applies to all four of our elementary schools. During the 2011-2012 school year, we unveiled this exciting method of grading/assessing students to help make sure all students are successful at meeting grade-level standards. The fundamental purpose for using standards is to identify and prioritize content standards to appropriately identify student learning in the classroom.

Educators are expected to teach to the Common Core State Standards, as well as the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS). The new standards-based report card provides a tool to accurately communicate to parents and guardians the progress their child is making on district-identified essential standards for each grade level, Pre-K through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. These standards represent those of focus for English Language Arts and Mathematics, specifically, as identified by district leaders and teachers. These foundational standards are those that students need to master in order to be successful in the next grade level. There are more Common Core Standards for each grade level and NJCCCS for other content areas that will also be taught in the curriculum; for the complete list of standards visit the district website [www.monroetwp.k12.nj.us](http://www.monroetwp.k12.nj.us).

The new report card accurately represents a child's growth and clearly communicates progress of students, relative to grade-level standards. The traditional grading method (% , A,B, etc.) no longer is applicable when evaluating student performance. Performance indicators are now used to indicate progress, as follows: E—meaning the student has exceeded, and consistently exceeds performance on grade-level standards; M—meaning the student has met and consistently demonstrates mastery of grade-level standards; P—meaning the student is progressing and approaching mastery, but does not consistently meet grade-level standards; N—meaning the student needs improvement, is not meeting expectations for grade-level standards.

The standards-based report card is helpful in several ways. First, it helps make sure there is more consistency of expectations from teacher to teacher. It helps teachers and students focus on the standards from the very beginning of the school year, giving students the opportunity to get help early if they are not making adequate progress. Finally, it gives parents information on how their student is doing based on the standards.

The following Standard-Based Report Card Teacher/Parent Guide provides information about standards, grade reporting, and a description of the analysis process for determining deficiency. Hopefully, you will find this to be a useful resource as the year progresses. If you have specific questions, feel free to contact your school's principal, or Mrs. Carol Mizrahi, the Supervisor of Elementary Curriculum.

Sincerely,

Mr. Charles M. Earling  
Superintendent of Schools



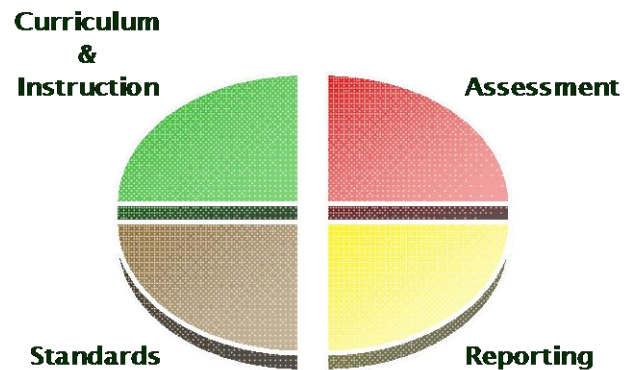
## **Acknowledgements:**

The Monroe Township elementary school leaders would like to extend appreciation for the efforts of teachers, principals, parents, and students who provided insight and valuable feedback regarding this new grading system, representing a huge paradigm shift for all. As we continue to refine the process of standards-based grading, it is critical for ongoing dialogue, feedback, and collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

# Components of a Standards-Based System

**These are the four essential components of a standards-based system:**

1. The content standards, as outlined by the NJ Common Core Standards, that describe what a student should know and be able to do at a grade-level;
2. The standards-based curriculum or roadmap a teacher uses to ensure that instruction targets these standards;
3. The assessments that a teacher uses to measure learning and the extent to which a student has met the standards;
4. The reporting tool that allows a teacher to communicate accurately a student's progress towards meeting standards at critical junctures throughout the school year. The standards-based report card completes our standards-based system.





## **Standards: What Do They Really Mean?**

Standards provide focus for the work of students, teachers, and parents.

Standards are benchmarks for what students in the highest performing school districts and countries in the world can accomplish in core subjects. Our standards are meant to prepare our students to be productive citizens in a rapidly changing world that demands critical thinking and problem solving. Our standards—and the curriculum experiences leading to those standards—combine a deep understanding of subject matter with the capacity to apply what has been learned in real world situations. They communicate to parents, students and teachers and the community the expectations we hold for student learning.

Standards help our school community understand what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level. With meaningful feedback, students will be able to more accurately assess their own performance in relation to the standards and determine what they need to do to ensure that their work meets expectations.

Standards help teachers by providing a focus for teaching, learning and assessment. When teachers are clear about the goals for their students, they can focus their time and energy on helping students improve their work in relation to these goals. In a standards-based system, teachers align curriculum, assessment and instruction to the standards so that teaching time is spent on that which matters most. Ultimately, teachers want to assess students in what they know and how they can use their knowledge and skills to become critical thinking and life-long learners.

Standards provide parents an opportunity to more fully participate in their child's education. When teachers provide parents with clearly defined expectations and models or examples of the work that is expected (evidence), parents are better able to understand and support their child's learning and progress at home and in the community.

Standards provide a framework for understanding the expectations for all students. By clearly stating what is expected, students, teachers and parents alike, are more informed and able to support the achievement of these standards.



### **Definitions of Proficiency Levels:**

At the elementary level, there are currently four reporting periods. For the first two, students are evaluated based on their progress toward end-of-the-year grade-level expectations. Students may not receive a mark of an M (meets standards) or an E (exceeds standards) before achieving end-of-the-year grade level mastery. In fact, it is expected that students making good progress towards meeting grade-level standards may receive an N or a P during the first two reporting periods.

The final report card marks reflect a student's achievement of the skills, strategies, and concepts identified in the Common Core Standards for that grade-level. The performance levels used to indicate student progress are broadly defined as:

**E = Exceeds** standards; consistently exceeds grade-level standards as demonstrated by a body of evidence that shows depth of understanding and flexible application of grade-level concepts.

**M = Meets** standards; consistently demonstrates mastery of grade-level standards, as demonstrated by a body of evidence that shows independent understanding and application of grade-level concepts.

**P = Progressing**; occasionally, meeting grade-level standards as demonstrated by a body of evidence that shows incomplete/inconsistent understanding and application of grade-level concepts.

**N = Needs** improvement; lacking progress toward meeting grade-level standards as demonstrated by a body of evidence that shows minimal understanding and application of grade-level concepts.

Performance levels on report cards denoted with an \* indicate that classroom instruction is below the current grade-level of the student.



## Grade-Reporting: What Do the Performance Levels Really Mean?

**E** In order for a student to earn an **E** on a report card, or individual standards/assignments/assessments, learning and performance is beyond grade-level standards/expectations. Evidence indicates that the student:

- consistently and independently **exceeds** the standards/expectations
- shows an in-depth understanding of concepts and skills
- makes insightful connections to other ideas and concepts
- independently seeks out ways to challenge him/herself
- applies and extends the key concepts and skills for the grade-level

### EXAMPLES:

- ✓ A 2<sup>nd</sup> grader independently reads and comprehends *James and the Giant Peach* (lexile 870).
- ✓ A 4<sup>th</sup> grader consistently writes with voice, vivid vocabulary, and elaborates with specific, supporting details.
- ✓ A kindergartener understands the concept of multiplication.

**M** In order for a student to earn an **M** on a report card, or individual standards/assignments/assessments, student work is completed independently, thoroughly, and accurately on grade-level standards/expectations. Evidence indicates that the student:

- consistently and independently meets grade-level standards/expectations
- shows a solid understanding of concepts and skills
- applies key concepts and skills for a grade level

### EXAMPLES:

- ✓ A 2<sup>nd</sup> grader reads and comprehends *Magic Treehouse Books* (lexile 650) using taught strategies.
- ✓ A 4<sup>th</sup> grader consistently writes with appropriate vocabulary and specific supporting details.
- ✓ A kindergartener identifies and extends patterns.

**P** In order for a student to earn an **P** on a report card, or individual standards/assignments/assessments, progress toward grade-level standards/expectations with some additional help and support. Evidence indicates that the student:

- may receive assistance while completing required assignments
- shows some understanding of concepts and skills
- is beginning to apply key concepts and skills for the grade-level standards/expectations

### EXAMPLES:

- ✓ A 2<sup>nd</sup> grader reads but needs help comprehending *Magic Treehouse Books*.

- ✓ A 4<sup>th</sup> grader consistently expresses thoughts in writing, but may lack structure, details, figurative language, and other critical writing elements.
- ✓ A kindergartener recognizes numbers 1-10.



In order for a student to earn an **N** on a report card, or individual standards/assignments/assessments, he/she experiences difficulty meeting grade-level standards/expectations. Evidence indicates that the student:

- needs additional time and experience to achieve grade-level standards/expectations.
- consistently requires assistance.
- has difficulty understanding the key concepts and skills for the grade-level.
- may not be ready to work with grade-level material.

#### EXAMPLES:

- ✓ A 2<sup>nd</sup> grader is learning and applying first grade high-frequency words.
- ✓ A 4<sup>th</sup> grader consistently struggles to effectively use the writing process, missing structure, details, and often thoughts are not well-developed.
- ✓ A kindergartener draws 10 apples when asked to draw 5.

### **Overcoming Standards-Based Challenges: The Paradigm Shift**

One great departure from standards-based grading is moving away from the notion of “excellence” by using percentages and/or A’s and B’s. Our goal for all children is that they get all M’s! An M should NOT be looked at as a B; you can’t compare apples and oranges! In the past, we’ve had students who earned A’s, but are not proficient on NJASK; we MUST focus on skills and standards. Ex: a 96 on every assessment doesn’t mean a child is to get an E when the assessments are based on those skills that child is expected to learn at that grade level; the child is doing what he/she should be (ie: mastering the skill taught), not necessarily exceeding it. In addition, previously the student who came prepared, or participated, or did homework earned points for those essential activities. As a result his/her grade was falsely inflated, when in reality, those activities do not necessarily denote skill mastery. Therefore, such essential skills as listening, following directions, completing homework are no longer part of a standards-based grade, but are reflected in “Characteristics of A Successful Student”.

Each child grows and develops at his/her own rate. Therefore, even children in the same grade-level have the potential to differ widely from their peers in their rate of learning. There are, however, performance expectations or “benchmarks” that we expect all students in a particular grade-level to master by the end of the year.

Williamstown Middle School is not using standards-based grading. Currently, our focus is to build a strong academic foundation for our students by focusing on skills and the standards. If students master the elementary standards, they will certainly be successful when they encounter the traditional grading system at WMS. Because the secondary level of education (grades 6-12) uses credits and a GPA for eventual admission to college, they will continue to use the traditional grading system; Post-secondary education (college) has not yet begun to make the transition to the use of standards.



### **Analysis Process:**

Before making a determination regarding student proficiency and marking it on the report card, teachers should analyze a student's progress over the course of the reporting period. It is important to note that teachers have been reviewing the results of assessments and student work throughout the reporting periods to determine next steps for instruction.

Parents will have access to PowerSchool throughout the year to monitor student progress. Although traditional grades will no longer be used, performance indicators will be available. For students in grades K-2, there will be a window of time when PowerSchool will be open mid-marking period (progress report); for students in grades 3-4, the window of access will be open all year.

The analysis for student proficiency is based on key pieces of evidence. This process requires that a teacher:

- Collect key samples of student work in a body of evidence.
- Analyze this entire body of evidence in comparison to a proficient body of evidence.

### **A Body of Evidence in: Language Arts and Mathematics**

The following lists indicate the types of evidence a teacher should collect in preparation for using the standards-based report card. The district has adopted the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) adaptive assessment by NWEA to provide valuable information regarding student academic growth in reading and mathematics. The results of MAP will be used to guide instruction, indicating academic areas of relative strength and those needing more focus. While the only mandatory assessment is the NJASK for students in grades 3 and 4, it is not required that a teacher collect every piece of evidence listed below for every student, these pieces of evidence will create a well-rounded picture of student progress towards meeting grade-level standards.

#### **English Language Arts**

- In kindergarten and first grade, on-going assessments embedded in the Foundations program to chart student mastery.
- Teacher-created standards assessments
- End of unit assessments
- Reading logs and rubrics
- Authentic reading assessments
- Anecdotal records
  - Independent reading/writing conferring notes
  - Small-group instruction
  - Text-based discussions
- Writing samples

#### **Mathematics**

- K-2 uses standards-based unit assessments with EnVisions Math
- Teacher-created standards assessments
- End of unit assessments
- Tasks and story problems which include numeric solutions, student's written explanation, and/or drawings and representations
- Math journals and rubrics





## **Process for Analyzing a Body of Evidence:**

In order to determine report card marks, a teacher should analyze a student's body of evidence using the following process:

### **Step 1: Analyze the Body of Evidence for Completeness**

- Assure that there is sufficient evidence for each of the reporting strands/standards.
- Gather additional evidence as needed.

*Key questions to consider:*

- ❖ What's in the body of evidence?
- ❖ How does the evidence align with essential standards and curriculum strands/checklists?
- ❖ Is the body of evidence complete/sufficient? If not, how will you collect what you need?

### **Step 2: Analyze the Body of Evidence for Quality**

- Analyze the quality of student work across the reporting period using the content area curriculum embedded rubrics as appropriate. Collaborate with colleagues to assure consistency of rubric use.
- At the end of the reporting period, organize and synthesize these assessments to determine the proficiency level for each of the reporting standards.

*Key questions to consider:*

- ❖ What is the quality of this body of evidence?
- ❖ What parts of the body of evidence show exceeding standards, mastery, progressing, or areas needing improvement? How do you know?



We hope you find this guide a helpful resource. As always, your child's classroom teacher will be available to answer any questions you might have regarding student progress. General questions regarding the report card format should be addressed to the building principal.