

# Elementary Standards-Based Report Card

PARENT GUIDE

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# Standards-Based Grading: What Parents Need to Know

by Joanna Nesbit as published in SchoolFamily.com © SchoolFamilyMedia

## What Is Standards-Based Grading?

Standards-based grading, sometimes called proficiency grading, is a method for teachers to measure how students are doing in meeting the learning goals for their grade as determined by their state's standards.

Learning goals, sometimes called learning standards, are the academic skills your child should know or be able to do for his grade level by the end of the school year.

Standards-based report cards give a grade for each learning goal, so students receive multiple grades in each subject area. In 5th grade math, for example, you'll see the subject broken into several categories, such as operations/algebraic thinking and fractions. Under each category, you'll see a list of math skills your child should be able to do, as well as a grade showing how your child is doing.

Academic success habits—educators may call this learning behavior or success attributes—are graded separately to provide an accurate picture of your child's academic achievement. Behavior includes aspects like completing tasks on time, going to class prepared, and contributing positively to class discussions.

## How Standards-Based Grades Differ From Traditional Letter Grades

Providing grades for academic proficiency and academic success habits gives parents

more information about the areas in which their child needs to improve than the traditional letter grading system. The traditional grading system combines many elements—test scores, quizzes, completed homework, classroom participation, coming to school on time, extra credit—and averages the semester's work into a percentage that correlates with a letter grade.

Because standards-based report cards separate the two, you can see if your child needs help with an academic concept or can't remember to turn in homework. Both should be addressed. An overarching goal in education these days is to develop students who not only master academic content but also demonstrate attributes for successful learning beyond school.

## How Progress Is Measured

Schools vary in their report card scales and terminology, but often they use a four-part scale to denote levels of achievement with descriptors.

"The big switch with standards-based grading is we work by levels, not percentages," says Ken O'Connor, independent educational consultant and author of *A Repair Kit for Grading: Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades*. It's more useful to know that your child has met a standard than that she has a B with 84 percent. Each grade on the report card represents a skill or knowledge standard your child has had the opportunity to learn, so it's a meaningful

snapshot of academic achievement. For behavior, report cards often use numbers, plus signs, or minus signs.

In some schools, it's possible to earn top grades during the first grading period because proficiency is what is expected at the time of the report card. In others, students are measured against year-end standards and they mostly earn 1's in the first grading period, 2's during the second, and then the 3's begin to appear as they master the learning targets. That grading approach is less common, O'Connor says. It's important to ask your child's teacher which time frame is being used.

## **How Do You Know How Your Child Is Doing?**

The number of categories on a standards-based report card can make your head spin. To help parents understand them, many districts post frequently asked questions and sample report cards on their websites. Because districts vary, don't be afraid to ask your child's teacher to explain the grading and how your school defines behavior. Many schools using standards-based grading also allow quiz retakes and late homework, which can feel strange to parents, but the goal is for students to master the standards. Find out how your school works.

If you're confused by what the levels mean, you're not alone. Keep in mind that a 3 or

"proficient" isn't the same as a B. It means your child has met state standards, and that's good. (In some states, the new Common Core standards will be raising the academic bar.) Also, even top students can earn a 2 or "approaching proficiency" grade, which can be a shock for some families. But it's more important to know if your child is struggling with a concept than to see a slew of top grades because of stellar academic success habits. On the upside, early low scores aren't averaged into the final grade—so once your child masters the concept, her final grade shows that. Along the way, O'Connor suggests checking your school's online reporting system and communicating with your child's teachers before problems go too far. "The report card should never come as a surprise," he says.

Level 4, or the top level, may be the trickiest to understand. If your child earned A's on traditional report cards, she may have received them for meeting the teacher's requirements, not necessarily for excelling at or going beyond grade level according to state standard. In the new system, 4's may be harder to come by (and 3's should be celebrated). As the grading system becomes familiar, you'll get more comfortable. The important thing is that your child is learning and making progress. Celebrate learning, and the grades will follow.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### **What is a standards-based report card?**

- The job of a report card is to clearly, fairly and objectively communicate how a child is doing in school. A standards-based report card (SBRC) tells specifically how a child is doing in school and what needs improvement. All teachers in a grade level measure student learning against set criteria. This is different from a traditional report card 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 comparisons among students. A traditional grade labels a child's performance and often includes such things as extra credit, work habits, and attitude; a standards-based report card gives concrete information the teacher and you can use to assist your child, and separates academic performance from work habits and personal characteristics.

### **What are standards?**

- Standards are statements of what children should know and be able to do at the end of a given year of school. Standards are written for each grade level and developed in such a way that they build upon each other from grade to grade.

### **What are the advantages of a standards-based report card?**

- You and your child know exactly what is expected in order to master the goals for a particular subject area.
- The expectations for what your child should be able to do at a grade level are consistent across the district.
- Your child is assessed with respect to standards rather than compared to other students.
- Grades are not weighted differently from teacher to teacher and a student's effort, attendance, and behavior is not used in the criteria for mastering standards.

### **How does this new report card help my child?**

- Utilizing a standards-based report card provides more specific information about your child's individual strengths and areas of focus in his/her progress in meeting the standards each year. This will allow you to be better able to support your child's learning at home.

### **What does "exceed grade level standard" (4) indicate?**

- If the student already demonstrates the standard when instruction begins, he/she is challenged with enrichment and/or acceleration opportunities. If a student is performing at a level beyond the grade-level expectation for that particular point in the school year, the standard is reported with "4". Exceeding expectations is not merely "grade level expectation plus", but rather a demonstration of skill and understanding that is substantially beyond what is expected at that time.

### **What does "meet grade level standard" (3) indicate?**

- This indicator suggests that the student consistently and independently meets all criteria of the grade-level standard at the point in the year when formal instruction and assessment related to all aspects of the standard has occurred.
- For most standards, which are end-of-year expectations, a student would not be able to receive a "3" at the end of the first marking period.
- Every student progresses at his/her own rate toward mastery of a standard and the teacher will notify parents of any concerns about a student's progress.
- Meeting the standard means that your child meets all criteria of the grade-level standard at the point in the year when formal instruction and assessment related to all aspects of the standard has occurred.

### **What does ‘progress toward grade level standard’ (2) indicate?**

- Progressing indicates that your child is meeting the expectations of a standard at that point in the school year. Many of the standards are taught and assessed over multiple marking periods. Students cannot receive a “2” until formal instruction and assessment related to that standard are complete.
- Progressing toward a standard means that your child is adequately meeting the expectations of a standard at that point in the school year.

### **What does not making adequate progress (1) indicate?**

- Not making adequate progress toward a standard means that your child may need extra time, experience and/or intervention for concepts, processes, and skills to be developed towards mastery. Areas with this indicator may require further discussion with your child’s teacher.

### **Why might I see a “NA” mark in certain areas of the report card?**

- A “NA” mark is used to indicate that a standard is not addressed and/or not assessed at a given time.
- Some standards are addressed and assessed throughout the school year. However, there are some standards that are only focused on during specific marking periods.

### **Do students who earned “A’s” in the past get “4” on the report card?**

- No, on the old reporting system, students who scored at 90% or more on their work would receive an “A”. This grade would be distributed to those students who were working at an accelerated rate and those students working at grade level. Using standards based report cards, students would earn the following grades:
  - working at grade level with instructional assistance or developing knowledge would earn a 2
  - working at grade level independently would earn a 3
  - working above grade level independently would earn a 4

### **What does it mean if an indicator for a particular standard changes from marking period to marking period?**

- The end-of-year expectations contained within a particular standard remain the same. However, the content associated with a standard could be taught over multiple marking periods. A student might be “Progressing” at the end of the first marking period indicating that he or she has learned all of the content from the first marking period while it is expected that the content would be mastered by marking period two.
- A student might have met a particular standard at the end of a marking period. However, in a subsequent marking period, the student might not independently and consistently meet that standard. Hence, the student might receive a score of “Progressing” or “Beginning to Progress” suggesting that the student needs additional reinforcement with the content related to the standard.



The standards that describe what a student should know and be able to do at a given grade-level

The standards-based curriculum a teacher uses to ensure that instruction targets the standards

Standards based grading is the product of good formative assessments. Together they allow teachers to give the feedback to modify instruction.

Teachers report out what students know and are able to do, relative to the academic standard versus a broad subject area.

As part of our standards-based system, the standards-based elementary report card is designed to fully communicate what students are expected to know and be able to do as set forth in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, as well as content area Learning Standards established by the Connecticut State Department of Education. It represents the rigor required to build a strong foundation for college and career readiness.

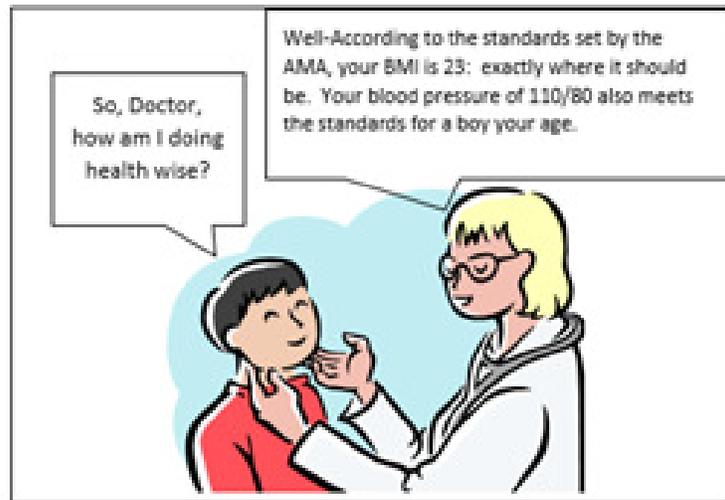
A standards-based report card communicates student progress toward meeting end-of-year learning standards. Teachers assess student performance against these learning standards, which are specific and observable grade-level skills articulated in the Hamden Public Schools elementary curriculum. Teachers do this by measuring individual student performance against the identified concrete learning standards, rather than in relation to the performance of other students. From the very beginning of the school year, the standards-based report card keeps teachers, parents, and students focused on the desired outcomes for year-end learning goals.

Hamden Public Schools place a strong value on home-school partnerships, and we view the report card as an important tool in furthering our shared understanding about student growth in both the academic areas and behaviors that support student learning.

### Current Report Cards



### Standards Based Report Cards



## ***Principles of Standards-Based Assessment and Reporting***

- Assessment and reporting should be based on clearly specified learning goals and performance standards.
- Reporting provides a snapshot of performance with respect to an end-of-year standard at a particular point in time.
- Progress toward the academic standards and behaviors that support learning are assessed and reported separately.
- Evidence for reporting progress should be both valid and reliable.

### ***Report Card Indicators***

The report card includes three types of indicators which provide information about your child's learning. The first are indicators for behaviors that promote learning. The second are indicators for academic progress. The third are indicators of overall achievement in a subject area.

#### ***Indicators for Academic Success Habits that Promote Learning***

Behaviors that promote learning will be reported with a set of letters as indicators of the consistency with which the student demonstrates each designated behavior. These indicators will be used to report on overall learning behaviors and behaviors with respect to the mathematical practices and scientific practices.

- M** The student consistently **masters** academic success habits.
- P** The student is **progressing** or inconsistent towards mastering academic success habits
- N** The student rarely or **needs improvement** towards mastering academic success habits.

#### ***Indicators for Academic Progress***

Academic progress with respect to the grade-level standards in literacy, social studies, math, science, physical education, art, and music, will be reported with a set of letters as indicators of academic progress toward grade-level standards.

- 4** Consistently exceeds grade level standard independently
- 3** The student consistently meets grade level standard independently
- 2** The student is making progress towards grade level standard
- 1** Not making adequate progress toward meeting grade level standard.
- NA** Standard has not been assessed

#### **Consistently Exceeds Grade Level Standard Independently (4)**

The Hamden School District is a great district because parents, teachers and students strive for excellence. However, the standards are very rigorous. So if a student meets grade level standards (3) it means he or she has learned a great deal and has earned excellent marks. Parents can be pleased with this indicator when it appears on the report card and know that it represents significant learning. For some students, differentiation will occur so that students can continue to learn at higher levels. Those students will then receive a "4" on those specific areas. For most students in most subject areas, grade level work is the most appropriate place to be working. Your child's teacher will be able to share when differentiation is appropriate and necessary to bring your child's knowledge to deeper levels

### **Consistently Meets Grade Level Standard Independently (3)**

*The student consistently and independently meets the standard.*

This indicator suggests that the student consistently and independently meets all criteria of the grade-level standard at the point in the year when formal instruction and assessment related to all aspects of the standard has occurred.

Reported grades are based upon student performance related to standards addressed within the units of study for which formal instruction has been completed and assessment has been provided. Most standards are complex and formal instruction and assessment of each standard would occur over two or three marking periods. Depending on the grade level, formal instruction and assessment would be completed for only a few standards during the first reporting period. Therefore, for most standards, a student would not be able to receive an "3" at the end of the first marking period.

For example, for the third grade math descriptor, "Uses strategies to solve two-step word problems involving the four operations," the underlying standard requires students to:

- solve multi-step word problems using the four operations
- represent these problems using equations with a letter standing for the unknown quantity
- assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies including rounding

Instruction and formal assessment related to this standard would take place over the first two reporting periods. At the end of the second reporting period, when formal instruction and assessment related to all aspects of the end-of-year learning target has occurred and a student consistently and independently demonstrates mastery of the standard, the student would receive a "3."

### **Making Progress towards Grade Level Standard (2)**

*The student is **progressing** toward consistently and independently meeting the standard.*

This indicator suggests that the student meets the criteria of the grade-level standard for which formal instruction and assessment has occurred. The student's progress toward consistently and independently meeting the standard is "on target" with standard-aligned instruction.

As an example, for the first grade report card descriptor in math, "Solves addition problems within 20," the underlying standard requires students to be able to add within 20 demonstrating fluency for addition within 10 as well as use strategies such as:

- counting on;
- making ten (e.g.,  $8 + 6 = 8 + 2 + 4 = 10 + 4 = 14$ );
- using the relationship between addition and subtraction (e.g., knowing that  $8 + 4 = 12$ , one knows  $12 - 8 = 4$ ); and
- creating equivalent but easier or known sums (e.g., adding  $6 + 7$  by creating the known equivalent  $6 + 6 + 1 = 12 + 1 = 13$ ).

If formal instruction and assessment within the first marking period focused on the dimensions of the standard related to addition within 10 and the student mastered those aspects of the standard, the students' progress would be on-target with instruction; the student would receive a "2." A score of a "2" could merely mean that the student just needs a little more time as the standard was recently introduced.

### **Not Making Adequate Progress (1)**

The student is not yet demonstrating progress toward the standard. This indicator suggests that the student has not demonstrated progress toward the criteria of the grade-level standard. Therefore, extra time, experience, and/or intervention would be required to support the student in working toward the Standard. The intervention could take on a range of forms, including additional time, differentiated instruction within the classroom, or extra academic support, depending upon the needs of the learner.

### **Standard Not Addressed and/or Not Assessed at This Time**

This indicator suggests that the standard was not addressed in the current report card. Formal instruction and assessment in the reporting period were not focused on and/or did not allow for assessment of the standard. The standard might be addressed in a subsequent marking period or the amount of instruction related to the standard in the current marking period might not allow for formal assessment and subsequent reporting of progress related to the standard.

## **Standards-Aligned Descriptors**

The Common Core State Standards aim to provide a consistent and clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. Aligning our report cards to the Common Core State Standards enables teachers to provide specific feedback about a child's progress as he/she works to reach proficiency in meeting grade level expectations.

In addition to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, Connecticut State outlines content specific learning standards for Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, and The Arts.

It is our hope that by providing you with detailed information regarding academic and behaviors expectations for your child that you and your child's teacher can better work together to assure your child's success.

To find out more about the Common Core State Standards and content specific Connecticut State Learning Standards please visit the Connecticut State Department of Education website at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&Q=320954&sdePNavCtr=|#45443>

Subject Area

Marking Period

- Grade K Report Card			
Subject Area	MP1	MP2	MP3
<b>Mathematics</b>			
Knows number names and the count sequence			
Counts to tell the number of objects			
Compares numbers			
<b>Operations and Algebraic Thinking</b>			
Understands addition as putting together and adding to			
Understands subtraction as taking apart and taking from			
Adds fluently within 5			
Subtracts fluently within 5			
<b>Number and Operations in Base Ten</b>			
Works with numbers 11 - 19 to gain a foundation for place value			
<b>Measurement and Data</b>			
Describes and compares measurable attributes			
Classifies objects and counts the number of objects in each category			
<b>Geometry</b>			
Identifies and describes shapes			
Analyzes, compares, creates and composes shapes			
<b>English Language Arts</b>			
<b>Foundational Skills</b>			
Demonstrates understanding of the organization of print features			
Demonstrates understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds			
Knows and applies grade level phonics skills			
Reads simple texts with purpose and understanding			
<b>Reading - Literacy and Informational Text</b>			
Asks and answers questions about a text, with support			
Retells stories, including key details and story elements, with support			
Demonstrates an understanding of author/illustrator and describes the relationships between illustrations and the text in which they appear, with support			
Compares and contrasts a variety of texts, with support			
<b>Writing</b>			
Produces and organizes a variety of texts through drawing, dictation, and writing (opinion, informational, narrative), with support			
Strengthens writing through planning, revising and editing, with adult and peer support			
Demonstrates knowledge of grammar and usage when writing and speaking			
Begins to use capitalization and punctuation skills			
Spells simple words phonetically			
<b>Speaking and Listening</b>			
Participates in classroom conversations following basic rules for discussion			
Asks and answers questions to clarify thinking			
<b>English Language Development for English Language Learners (if applicable)</b>			
Expressive (communication through speaking and writing)			
Receptive (listening and reading skills)			
<b>Health</b>			
Understands healthy behaviors			
Understands ways to prevent diseases and injuries			
<b>Social Studies</b>			
Can explain the need for and purposes of rules in various settings			
Can compare their own point of view with others' perspectives			
Can create a chronological sequence of events (personal history, calendar)			
Can explain how all people, not just official leaders, play important roles in a community			
<b>Science</b>			
Demonstrates an understanding of scientific content and concepts			
Applies process skills in problem-solving to develop and justify explanations			
Demonstrates correct use of literacy and numeracy			
<b>Physical Education</b>			
Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns			
Understands movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics			
Participates regularly in physical activity			
Respects self and others in physical activity			
<b>Art</b>			
Demonstrates use of materials and techniques appropriately			
Demonstrates understanding of art concepts			
Makes connections between their own art and the world around them			
<b>Music</b>			
Demonstrates appropriate vocal awareness and technique			
Plays a variety of classroom instruments using appropriate technique			
Demonstrates an understanding of music concepts through original musical ideas			
Makes personal connections to music by analyzing and evaluating music			

**Academic Key**

- 4 - Consistently exceeds grade level standard independently
- 3 - Consistently meets grade level standard independently
- 2 - Progress toward grade level standard
- 1 - Not making adequate progress toward meeting grade level standard
- NA - Not assessed at this time

Listed under each learning goal are the skills/concepts that align the curriculum.

These are the levels of proficiency used to report achievement in the content areas.

- What Changes Mean**
- Students will receive a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4 for all targets that have already been addressed in the curriculum. Students will receive a score of NA if a standard has not yet been addressed.
  - These scores do not mean the same as A, B, C, D, and F.
  - The targets or standards listed in each area are what students are expected to master by the END of the school year. Thus most students will earn 2's as they currently are working towards mastery.
  - Students will also receive feedback on Academic Success Habits. In this area, students will receive an M for Mastery, P for Progressing or N for Needs improvement.

