

Horse Heaven Hills Middle School Standards-Based Grading

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why have we changed to a standards-based grading system (SBG)?**

Our goal is to accurately communicate what students know and are able to do in relationship to the end-of-year grade level standards in each subject. Students show mastery of a learning target when they demonstrate the application of that knowledge over time. Students in Washington State must demonstrate mastery of specific knowledge and skills in order to graduate from high school. SBG provides greater consistency from teacher to teacher about what a grade represents as well as greater clarity of communication about student performance to both parents and students.

- **Please explain the difference between content knowledge grades and work habit grades. How can my child get a 4 in one and a 2 in the other?**

Learning tasks that demonstrate understanding of content knowledge are reflected in a student's academic grade. Tasks that are assigned for practice and preparation are reflected in the work habits grades. It is most likely that a student who has very good work habits will also demonstrate that she/he has learned and will make acceptable progress toward the standards. However, we have all known someone who doesn't have to work hard and still gets good grades. Learning to produce a quality product according to established criteria is an important goal of public education and an essential skill for life. There are also those students who work extremely hard, but their understanding is not complete enough to achieve the academic standard. The effort of those students should be recognized as well.

- **How does this system prepare students for high school and college?**

Standards-Based Grading clearly communicates to students and parents what knowledge, skills and work habits are firmly in place. This feedback gives students information they need to build on strengths and work on deficiencies. Performance in middle school is one critical predictor of success in high school and college. Students who meet standards and demonstrate effective work habits will likely succeed in high school. Those who don't won't. In July, the Washington State legislature voted to adopt the Common Core State Standards that will be implemented for the 2014-15 school year. These common standards have been adopted by more than 40 states. They were written to make sure students who graduate from high school will be college-ready.

- **If my child does everything that is expected of him/her, then why does that only earn a 3?**

Earning a "3" means a student has demonstrated the criteria for mastery of that skill. Students who earn a "4" will need to show learning above and beyond. Teachers will provide the opportunity for students to go beyond what is typically expected by using rubrics to make the expectations clear.

- **How does my child get a 4 in a class? How does one “exceed” the standard?**

A student’s performance beyond the standard should be defined in each course and communicated to students and parents minimally at the beginning of the grading period and, ideally, (at least for the students) each time a student is asked to demonstrate higher learning. There should be performance rubrics in place as well as exemplars of student work available that exceed the standard so that students know the target they need to meet to earn a 4.

- **I don’t understand the terms “most recent evidence,” or “most important learning goals.” “Why aren’t grades just averaged?**

Because the purpose of standards-based grading is to report what students know and are able to do, averaging does not represent an accurate picture of where a student is in his learning. A student who struggles in a class at the beginning of a grading period and receives poor grades, but who keeps working and by the end of the grading period can clearly demonstrate competence in the subject, should receive a grade that reflects that competence. The average is a fixture in most grading systems, but the average does not always represent the data accurately. Consider two students, Stewart and Maria. Stewart earns the following scores: 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85, 85 and 85. The average is not difficult to calculate, and Stewart’s grade is posted as a B. Maria struggles in math and turns in this performance: 50, 60, 65, 70, 80, 85, 90, 90, and 90. Her mean score of a little over 75 would result in a C on her report card, but it is obvious that Maria now understands the math even though she struggled in the beginning.

- **What’s the difference between a 2 and a 1 if neither actually “meets” the standard?**

A 2 indicates that the student is progressing toward meeting the standard and, if he continues to work at it, will likely become proficient. On the other hand, a 1 indicates that the student is not making appropriate progress toward meeting the standard. Additionally, such a student will need interventions to be put in place in order to make the necessary progress toward meeting the standard.

- **How will students be recognized for honor roll?**

HHH will recognize outstanding performance for both academic performance and work habits. Students who earn all 3’s and 4’s for academic standards will receive a Mustang Merit award. Students who receive all 3’s and 4’s in work habits will receive a Motivated Mustangs award. Students who qualify for both will have that notation on their certificate.