



# Newton County School District Standards-Based Instruction and Reporting

*The following information provides an overview of recent changes to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting.*

## **What is standards-based instruction and reporting?**

As part of the efforts to improve schools and provide accountability, many states have developed and adopted curriculum frameworks. These frameworks define grade level learning standards -- what students should know and be able to do. As a result, many districts are moving to a method of reporting student achievement that references standards. A standards-based system reflects progress by specific learning standards and a clear distinction is made between academic achievement and learning skills (effort and behavior). Grading practices are revised to improve and support effective teaching and learning. Required procedures for grading are defined, used consistently and explained clearly to students and parents at the beginning of a semester or school year.

Standards-based classrooms allow teachers to plan instruction and interventions, including acceleration, based on very specific student data related to standards so they can challenge and support all students. Standards-based classrooms focus on four critical questions:

- What do students need to know and be able to do?
- How will we know that they have learned it?
- What will we do when they haven't learned it?
- What will we do when they already know it?

## **Why is NCSS implementing standards-based classrooms?**

The revised state curriculum, the Georgia Performance Standards, has moved the student achievement "bar" higher for all students. Graduation requirements have increased to better prepare students to enter post-secondary opportunities including colleges and universities, technical schools, and the work force. As a result, Newton's curriculum has been ramped up to provide better instruction for all students across the district.

In order to more adequately reflect what students know, understand and are able to do, Newton is improving the link between curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in grades K-12.

## **How will the standards-based classroom be reflected on report cards?**

Report cards are developed to appropriately match the development level of the students served. Newton County offers two distinct levels of reporting:

- Primary years including kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. The primary years report card is designed to support young students and like previous versions do not report using letter grades. District and Georgia policies recognize that young students need to be assessed differently from higher grade levels.
- Grades four through twelfth. Intermediate classrooms, middle, and high schools report using letter grades (A, B, C, and F) and number grades.

For all students in grades K-12, the report card grade summarizes achievement on many tasks or assessments during a marking period. These tasks or assessments may take different forms including tests, quizzes, compositions, exhibits, products, presentations, graphic displays, performances, discussions, and simulations. As time passes, report cards are reviewed and revised as needed.

## **Revision of Primary Years Report Cards**

In recent years, the primary report card has been revised to provide more specific information to students and parents. Standards replace general topics like "Reading" or

“Math” and now cite several critical learning expectations for each subject area and grade level. The performance descriptors on the primary report cards were revised to indicate that a revision had taken place and to more closely match the standards-based classroom and the Georgia CRCT (state tests) for these levels.

### **What is the benefit for parents and students in the primary years?**

Parents and students will receive more complete information; rather than receiving one grade in English Language Arts or Math, parents now receive several points of reference on the progress of their young child which can be useful information for supporting instructional goals at home. If a parent knows that their child has difficulty “sounding out words” (Grade 2 Reading), they can support learning at home by reading aloud with their child and modeling how to decode/sound out unfamiliar words.

### **Who helped create the new primary reporting system?**

Grading and reporting committees comprised of teachers and administrators have conducted work the past several years and continually review tools used for communication. Specifically for the primary years report cards, teachers were recommended by school administrators to serve on grade level committees. Teams have continued to provide input and feedback on a yearly basis and report cards are revised to reflect feedback from teachers, administrators and parents.

### **How does the primary reporting system affect students in special populations?**

Students receiving services for limited English proficiency, special education, or 504 disabilities will be afforded all accommodations and modifications, as documented by the English Language Learner (ELL) plans, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), or Section 504 plans. Additional reports will be provided to communicate progress on goals specified in each plan. Students who plan to earn a diploma are held to grade level or course expectations. With information from both sources, individual plans and grade level report cards, parents and students have a better understanding of performance in relation to individual goals and to grade level standards.

### **How does standards-based reporting compare to the letter grade system?**

Letter grades traditionally have measured how well students do in comparison to their classmates. Letter grades typically reflect grading “on the curve” and rank students according to the performance of others most often using a 100 point scale. Standards-based reporting measures how well an individual student is doing in relation to the grade level standards, not the work of other students. This gives the parent and student a better understanding of their child’s strengths and weaknesses and encourages all students to do their best in relation to the specified learning target or goal. For grades 4-12, letter grades will not be replaced but may be augmented with more specific criteria matching grade level/course standards.

### **How does the primary reporting system work? How will the ratings be determined?**

At the end of a marking period for grades K-3, teachers report two kinds of information on the report card:

- academic achievement
- learning skills and behavior

#### **Academic Achievement**

Teachers plan and deliver instruction based upon all grade level standards and report critical standards needed for success at the next level on the report card. Standard statements such as “Uses strategies to gain meaning from text” or “Uses multiple representations of numbers” help to more clearly define expectations. When reporting academic achievement, teachers will use the following ratings:

- 3 - This skill has been taught, assessed and exceeded
- 2 - This skill has been taught, assessed, and me

- 1 - This skill has been taught, assessed, but not met at this time
- N/A Not Assessed at this Time

### **Learning Skills and Behavior**

Teachers observe students' learning skills and promote improvement in skills such as organizes self and materials, works independently, exhibits good listening skills, accepts responsibility for behavior, works cooperatively with others, controls talking, follows directions, and shows respect for peers, authority, and property. When reporting learning skills and behaviors, teachers use the following ratings:

- S SUCCESSFUL - Student displays appropriate learner skills and behaviors
- P PROGRESSING - Student is progressing; applies appropriate learning skills and behavior most of the time
- N NEEDS IMPROVEMENT - Student does not display learning skills and behaviors that lead to success

Ongoing training provided by district support staff will sustain implementation of the new report card and help to identify revisions needed. Members of the kindergarten, first, and second committees will continue to review and make recommendations for improvement for the subsequent year. District personnel will gather feedback from teachers, administrators, and parents on the effectiveness of development, communication, and implementation of the report cards.

### **How will the district accomplish the revision process of the primary report cards?**

Newly developed report cards will be reviewed yearly in order to reflect any revisions to the state frameworks or changes in district curricula. Input from students, parents, teachers, and administrators will be reviewed to improve the reporting process. Revisions will be made as needed to communicate information in the best manner possible.

### **In what other ways is student achievement communicated to students and parents?**

Teachers provide students and parents with information about achievement throughout the marking period. This feedback may take several forms, including the following:

- Report cards: Issued on a quarterly, semester, or annual basis, report cards show academic grades and learning skills.
- Progress reports: Many schools send interim or progress reports for students. Teachers send reports midway through the quarter to parents of students who are in danger of failing the marking period.
- Parent conferences: Teachers of grades K-8 schedule conferences during the scheduled Conference Week. Teachers and parents may request additional conferences to discuss student progress and/or concerns, as needed.
- Informal methods: Teachers use a variety of methods to report achievement and learning skills to students and parents, such as telephone calls, email, observation records, and feedback sheets/checklists.
- Teacher feedback: Teachers give feedback on class work and homework to ensure that students learn. Feedback may be oral, as in reviewing assignments and assessments in class or written, as in writing comments on assignments. Teachers may provide feedback to individual students, small groups, or the whole class.

Parents are encouraged to ask their child's teachers specific questions concerning grades.

### **How will students and parents know about individual classroom or course-specific grading procedures?**

Best practice supports teachers informing students and parents of grading and reporting practices at the beginning of a year, or a semester, or as grading procedures change.

Information should include:

- Class or course expectations
- What is included in the grade
- How grades are determined, including weights and proportions

- Details about homework and learning skills

### **What about students in third grade and grades 4-5?**

Teachers in grades 4 and 5 are aligning standards with assessment and reporting procedures and discussing improved grading practices. Initial work in determining categorical evidence by standards, rather than assessment method, to support grading is taking place. Building the evidence behind what the letter grades represent is important work for teachers and students. Letter grades will not be replaced on the report cards for these levels.

### **What work was reviewed throughout development of the primary reporting system?**

#### **Neighboring Counties...**

Paulding Kindergarten Report Cards  
Bartow Primary Report Cards  
Forsyth Primary Report Cards  
Cobb County Report Cards  
Spaulding County Report Cards

#### **Other districts...**

Nashville, Tennessee  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
Montgomery Co, Maryland  
Alberta Province, Canada  
River East-Transcona District, Manitoba

#### **Research on Standards-Based Reporting**

Thomas Guskey  
Bob Marzano  
Ken O'Connor  
Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe  
Rick Stiggins  
Black and William  
Anne Davies  
Phil Schlechty

Additional information about grading and reporting policies is available to students, parents, community member, teachers, and administrators on the NCSS web site

[www.newtoncountyschool.org](http://www.newtoncountyschool.org).