

SBG Parent Communication - Deerfield Public Schools District 109

Dear District 109 Parents and Guardians,

As you may know, Deerfield Public Schools District 109 moved to standards-based grading and reporting (SBGR) to begin the 2014-15 school year at the K-5 level. This resulted in a concomitant revision of our K-5 progress reports in which we now communicate student progress to standards each trimester. Last year, a team of educators across the district met throughout the year to begin the transition to SBGR at the middle school level as well. After a great deal of research, learning, and professional dialogue, the decision was made to adopt the SBGR approach to communicating student progress for grades 6-8 beginning with the 2016-17 school year. During the current school year, many teachers at our two middle schools are transitioning from a “traditional” grading approach to a “standards-based” model. We want to share our plans and progress in this area as we make the transition throughout the year; as such, I will be sending a quarterly communication updating everyone on what it means, why it matters, and how it will look. The research and experts in the field of grading and reporting have asserted that standards-based grading and reporting allows us to align our grading and reporting practices to our standards-based instructional practices. When implemented, SBGR allows us to more accurately and consistently report student achievement to students and parents/guardians as it relates to state and national standards. Grades on a report card are the ultimate (albeit not the only, nor most important) form of feedback to students and their parents about student progress toward mastery of standards. Grades need to be accurate and meaningful. Students and parents/guardians need a precise picture of what has been learned and what still needs to be learned.

Grading and reporting around specific standards, while using the accompanying strategy of formative assessment with feedback related to progress toward mastery of standards, has been shown to significantly boost achievement and motivation for students. Research by Black and William (1998) and Hattie (2009) demonstrates that high quality formative assessment and feedback have a powerful impact on student learning. As students’ progress in their mastery of standards, they feel motivated and more successful because enhancing perceived competence is motivating in and of itself. Students begin to think about grades and other assessments that teachers use to provide informational feedback as helpful toward their success.

Purpose Statement for 6-8 Standards-Based Report Cards

The purpose of the report card should drive our actions as educators leading up to the official reporting periods. The purpose of the new (2016-17) report card is as follows: *“The purpose of the district report cards is to clearly communicate with parents and students about the achievement of specific learning standards and student work habits. It identifies students’ levels of progress with regard to those standards, areas of strength, and areas where additional time and effort are needed.”*

5 Principles of Standards-Based Grading

- *Standards-Based Grading Principle 1: Grades and Reports Should Be Based on Clearly Specified Learning Goals and Performance Standards.* All 6-8 students in Deerfield Public Schools District 109, no matter their school, will be graded using the same standards.
- *Standards-Based Grading Principle 2: Evidence Used for Grading Should Be Valid.* Students are assessed individually on what they are taught. There are no trick questions and no surprises.
- *Standards-Based Grading Principle 3: Grading Should Be Based on Established Criteria, Not on Arbitrary Norms.* On a math assessment, students are graded on the math standards assessed, not on arbitrary norms such as poor handwriting or no name on their paper.

- *Standards-Based Grading Principle 4: Focus on Achievement, and Report Other Factors Separately.* Students' achievement should be the only aspect included in their grade. Students' math grades will reflect their math achievement. However, their work habits and responsibilities during the quarter will be assessed and reported separately.
- *Standards-Based Grading Principle 5: Avoid Grading Based on (Mean) Averages.* Instead, focus on the most recent, comprehensive, or frequent evidence and/or performance levels.

Academic Grades

Beginning next year (the 2016-2017 school year), instead of assigning traditional letter grades (A, B, C, D, F), teachers in grades 6-8 will assign 4-3-2-1 grades much like we currently do at the K-5 level. These are as follows:

4 - Exceeding Standards. Student exceeds grade level expectations by independently applying and utilizing concepts and skills.

A student at a level 4 independently uses and applies knowledge in ways that demonstrate higher level thinking skills. Such a student is performing above grade level standards. A student who is able to consistently perform at Level 4 is one who independently demonstrates extensions of his/her knowledge. S/He should be able to create analogies and/or find connections, integrating areas of study. S/He is "advanced" in that s/he is performing at a level above where we would expect her/him to be at a given point in time.

3 - Meeting Standards. Student demonstrates grade level expectations for concepts and skills.

A student at a Level 3 demonstrates understanding of grade level skills and concepts and requires minimal support. A level 3 throughout the school year indicates strong, excellent work at grade level. The 3 mark is the goal for the grade level and should be celebrated. Level 3 represents those students who are independently able to meet the standards. Students who are performing at Level 3 understand and use concepts and/or vocabulary and/or skills independently. These students understand not just the "what," but can correctly explain and/or demonstrate the "how" and "why."

2 - Working Toward Standards. Student is progressing toward basic understanding of grade level concepts and skills with assistance.

A student at a Level 2 has not yet met the standards but is progressing toward achieving skills and learning grade level concepts. Some support from teachers, parents and/or peers is needed. The 2 mark indicates ongoing growth, but not quite where we would expect them to be at that given point in time. The difference between a Level 1 and a Level 2 is the ability to demonstrate some understanding. At Level 2, a student can correctly identify some concepts and/or vocabulary, and/or use some skills. Students at Level 2 do not make connections among ideas nor are they able to demonstrate their learning without support.

1 - Not Meeting Standards. Student shows an emerging awareness of concepts and skills.

A student at a Level 1 is currently not meeting the grade level standards. The student demonstrates an inconsistent understanding and application of knowledge. Intervention is needed from teachers and parents. Students at this level are beginning to identify subject area concepts, vocabulary, and/or use skills. They are unable to make connections among ideas or extend the information.

Non-Academic Indicators (Habits of Success)

While we believe that work habits and social development criteria should be reflected separately on the report card, they are still a very important part of communicating to parents and students about student progress. While these are process factors, rather than results, they contribute to achievement and are valued both in school and in the wider world. Reporting on such habits communicates information to parents about whether their child is working hard, or hardly working. By including habits as a separate reporting category, teachers can more honestly communicate about such matters as behavior, participation, and completing assignments without distorting a student's actual achievement in learning. NOTE: Although

academic grades this year will remain as they were in previous years, the move to communicating student progress in the areas of “Habits of Success” will be included in this school year’s report cards. You should see these 4-3-2-1 marks for each subject area beginning with the 1st quarter report cards. The Habits of Success levels are:

3 – Consistently Demonstrates

2 – Sometimes Demonstrates

1 – Seldom Demonstrates

At our final meeting of the 2014-15 school year, our 6-8 staff reached consensus that -- considering the varying readiness levels of all staff members in moving forward -- it would be best to do some targeted practice during the 2015-16 school year before formally implementing our new Standards-Based Report Cards to start the 2016-17 school year. As a result, you may notice your children and/or their teachers talking about SBGR and sharing assignments, units, assessments, etc. relating to this shift in grading and reporting.

We have reached out to Deerfield High School to ensure we have their support as we move forward. Principal Chris Dignam and Assistant Principal Ken Williams have been very supportive of this work and agree it will provide them with even more information about students entering DHS from District 109. They further indicate that they, too, have been learning more about SBGR and have teachers who are piloting such an approach this school year.

Please anticipate additional communications from the Teaching and Learning Department about our progress in this area on a quarterly basis to coincide with the posting of report cards this year. I encourage you to send me questions we can answer in our second quarterly update about this topic. In addition, please feel free to contact our building administrators, our instructional coaches, or our teachers for additional information. Thank you as always for your support of teaching and learning in Deerfield Public Schools District 109!