Pros and Cons of Standards-Based Grading

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STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

What is Standards-Based Grading?

Standards-Based Grading is a relatively new trend in education based on research from the Marzano Research Laboratory. With SBG a 1-4 criteria replaces the traditional 0-100 scale. The purpose of SBG is to align grading with the state content standards and testing. SBG removes the traditional grading system of averaging all of a grading periods work such as daily classroom assignments, homework, or projects and students are assessed on their progress usually over one or two tests given during the grading period. The goal is that students take a more active roll in their learning by charting their progress and showing only what they have learned in class and not charting success based on extraneous factors such as previous knowledge or parent input.

SBG has been an attractive alternative to superintendents and school boards as they try to help their schools and students achieve exemplary standards for state testing. Many principals have jumped on the SBG bandwagon because it has eliminated the traditional honor roll system and therefore has reduced the amount of parents who tend to be vocal with teachers and administrators regarding grades, especially at the elementary level. Each student simply receives a   **1**=, below standard; shows little or no understanding. **2** = approaching standard; shows some understanding, with major (or many minor) errors. **3** = meets standard; demonstrates mastery of a skill/topic, perhaps with minor errors. **4** = exceeds standard; demonstrates complete mastery and conceptual understanding with no nontrivial errors.

As with any new trend in education, there are dozens of school districts nation-wide campaigning for this new way of thinking about grades. Parents can research online how each district is selling SBG to their parents. Here are some of the positives of SBG:

- With SBG students show what they really know.
- SBG has data driven results.
- SBG communicates student achievement.
- SBG shows a student's progress.
- Students are not defined by grades.
- Grades should show meaning.
- With SBG districts can better control grading practices.
- SBG reduces meaningless paperwork.
- It helps teachers adjust instruction.
- It is a launch pad for other reforms in education.

The Downside to Standards-Based Grading

SBG is a huge change for any school and many school administrators downplay any negative impact SBG may have on the students. Here are some concerns and questions parents and schools should consider before making the leap into SBG:

- Top performers might not be rewarded properly. SBG makes all students "average".

- SBG does not motivate a broad portion of the students in the middle ranks to perform to the best of their ability.

- Teachers might have to spend more time analyzing rather than teaching.

- Because SBG does not average homework or daily grades; good study habits will disappear in elementary school. If the district does not use SBG at the secondary level, students will fall behind and struggle with having homework in middle and high school.

- Not all students test well and therefore using daily work and homework grades is a better assessment of a student's true knowledge. Students with test anxiety or other learning disabilities such as dyslexia generally need those daily assignments and homework to help them show progress.

- When students transfer out of the district how does the 1-4 scale convert?

- SBG when used at the secondary level hurts college admissions. There is absolutely no mathematical way to convert a 1 to 4 scale into a 0 to 100 scale and accurately capture whether or not our students have mastered that subject.

- Colleges do not widely recognize SBG which will adversely affect our students when secondary schools use SBG.

- Don't traditional grades 0-100 accurately show student progress as well if the teachers have adequate amount of grades in their grade book?

- What is the cost to our district? How many current or past district employees work for Marzano Laboratory? How much money has our district paid to the Marzano Laboratory for training, software, or other educational needs?

- After many schools could not meet the passing requirements for their state standardized test required by No Child Left Behind Act, some states simply lowered their standards for passing. Isn't SBG doing the same thing, but changing the grading system to reflect more students are in the average range of a 2 or 3?

- With the 1-4 system based on a teacher's assessment, how can you have consistency from school to school or classroom to classroom? With SBG assessments become more subjective.

One district in Texas, Round Rock ISD, recently overturned the SBG system and went back to the traditional grading scale of 0-100. School board members quickly changed their position on SBG when parents were outraged and threatened not to reelect them. Other districts nation-wide are having similar struggles.

Whether you are for or against SBG, it is wise for all parents to do their homework and research SBG, ask the important questions, and do not blindly go along with changes until you have been educated.

Here are links to some school districts using or piloting SBG:

http://www.roundrockisd.org/index.aspx?page=3860

http://aurorak12.org/parents/sbg/

http://ksdcitizens.org/2011/05/19/standards-based-grading-in-ksd-middle-schools-is-controversial/

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3 Comments

The use of standards-based grading is growing | drwilda linked to this post.

corywstrasser   Reblogged this on PAS Principal and commented:
April 18, 2013   Why standards based grading and why not? Good read to get understanding of the issue.

Kim Powell   Very informative. Great site!
April 26, 2013

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