

October 25, 2013

Dear Adams 12 Parents,

As you know, we are engaged in Standards Based Grading in Adams 12 Five Star Schools. All Elementary, K-8 and Middle schools will be reporting grades in a Standards Based approach this school year. In addition, we are engaging in Standards Referenced grading at Mountain Range and Legacy High Schools. As we experience the middle of the first semester, I'd like to share some information with you about the practice of Standards Based Grading in Adams 12.

Let me begin by explaining that Standards Based Grading is a fancy way of saying that we want to report to you and your students about their progress toward Colorado Academic Standards, or learning targets for your student's grade level. Each content area, like reading, writing, math, social studies, science, art, physical education, etc. has its own standards, which tell us what students need to know and be able to do at certain points in learning in these content areas. Standards Based Grading allows us to have common language and practice across our system in what we expect of students at various grade levels and various content areas, and make sure parents and students understand that expectation and their next steps toward being on grade level.

Next, I'd like to explain how Standards Based Grading works. As teachers plan for lessons, they use units of study that align to these standards and determine what assignments and assessments students will do along the way, as they study. Teachers then look at those assignments and assessments and determine student progress toward the standards. When an assignment or assessment is graded, it is assigned a 1, 2, 3 or 4. The descriptions of the 1, 2, 3, and 4 level work for final grading purposes can be found in the gradebook reporting criteria for each content area. It is through the gradebook reporting criteria that we support common expectations for student performance across our entire district.

In addition to gradebook reporting criteria for final grades, teachers also use assignment or assessment criteria to let you and students know what expectations are of student work, as well as how your student did on a particular assignment or assessment. If you'd like to know how your student will be graded on a particular assignment, you can ask the teacher what his or her grading criteria is for that assignment and they can let you know. Often the criteria for certain assignments or assessments is in the form of a rubric. For example, if students write a poem in a poetry unit, the teacher might share a rubric with students that describes the elements of quality poetry. Sometimes teachers even create these rubrics or criteria for certain assignments along with students. As a parent, you can ask for and understand the rubrics or criteria for assignments and assessments your student has in class and the teacher can support you in knowing his or her expectations.

One very common misconception around Standards Based Grading is that students may not receive a 4 until the end of the school year. This is FALSE. Students may receive a 4 at any point in the year. The common theme in 4 level work is that students take what they know about a standard and apply that knowledge to new and unique circumstances. Teachers are working to make sure students have opportunities all along the year to apply their knowledge to new and unique circumstances. At any given point along the year, students will be given opportunities to apply their learning at a level 4. Please also note that if a student is performing at a level 3, then he or she is performing at proficiency for that grade level. When you ask what your student needs to do to move to the next level of performance in any content area, teachers will use the gradebook reporting criteria, as well as examples of your students assignments and assessments to share feedback and next steps with you and your student.

One other important understanding is for you to know that your student can and should have the opportunity to show progress toward a standard multiple times. Many teachers allow students to re-do work, or re-take assessments after further practice, to show progress toward standards over time. A student's grade will not be averaged, which allows lower performance on assignments and assessments to bring down a grade. Instead, your student's performance will be looked at over time. Please feel free to talk to your teacher about how your student is doing currently and what opportunities he or she will have in the coming months to show their understanding of standards.

We have shared progress with you about your student's performance at mid-semester, either through conferences, at the elementary level, or through conferences and a mid-term progress report, at the middle school level. Your student's progress at this time is not his or her final grade for this term. Teachers can and should explain to you what your student needs to do over the course of the next few weeks to achieve a 3 or 4 in certain standards.

Finally, please note that your students can and should be completing homework. Teachers should be assigning homework to allow students to practice certain standards. Completion of homework supports students in making progress toward standards, and it will be included in a student's grade for Scholarly Habits at the end of this semester in December.

The administration in Adams 12 is excited about the potential of Standards Based Grading as a tool to support common expectations for all students in all standards. Please go to www.adams12.org/sbg_contact if you have questions or concerns and we will be in touch with you in a timely manner. If you have questions or concerns about an individual student and his or her grades, please connect with your student's teacher and/or principal.

As the semester progresses, we will be hosting parent forums to discuss Standards Based Grading in more detail. These forums will be held by grade-level band and geographic location across our district. The dates for these forums will be published no later than November 15th.

Thank you,



Tracy Dorland, Chief Academic Officer
Adams 12 Five Star Schools