

**Guam Department of Education**  
**Standards-Based Grading Initiative:**

*“moving towards a more fair, accurate, and informative grading system”*

## General Information Sheet

**What is Standards-Based Grading (SBG)?** Standards-Based Grading (SBG) is a system of grading and reporting that measures student achievement of identified standards, skills and topics at each grade level and course. The goal of SBG is to better assess, monitor and communicate what each student knows and is able to do according to a clear and prescribed set of academic expectations. Many in the field of education view SBG as the natural next step in the implementation of content standards and a standards-based education system. On Guam, the first iteration of the Guam Content Standards and Performance Indicators was adopted in the spring of 1999. The revised content standards were adopted in 2010 and the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Math were adopted in 2012. The grading system, however, was never changed to reflect these adoptions and thus the direct reporting of student performance based on these standards was never achieved.

**What is a Standard?** A standard is an established expectation of what a student should know, understand and be able to do for a particular subject. Here are a couple of examples from two content areas:

- ✓ **English** – *Interpret figures of speech in context and analyze their role in the text.*
- ✓ **Mathematics** – *Measure the length of an object by selecting and using appropriate tools such as rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, and measuring tapes.*

**What are the main differences between SBG and traditional grading?** Traditional grading has the potential to be standards-based, but that would all depend on the individual teacher. Unfortunately, with no clear guidance or training provided to teachers and with no process in place to align grading practices, no one really knows what’s supposed to go into a particular grade, leaving each teacher to come up with a system on their own. It is because of this fact that traditional grading provides no real consistency or common meaning to the grades students earn. In contrast, with Standards-Based Grading:

- ✓ **Students will be assessed on a specific set of Standards, Skills and Topics** determined collaboratively by the teachers of that course that reflect and align to the GDOE content standards of that specific course (or national standards if a course does not have a currently adopted set of local standards) as well as any other set of expectations identified by individual or group of teachers.
- ✓ **Student achievement will be assessed and reported using a four-point proficiency scale instead of the current percentage grade.** The simplified scale gives students, teachers, and parents a quicker and clearer reference to easily determine which standards have been mastered and which need further study. These levels of proficiency will then be translated or converted to an easily recognizable letter grade.

**Sample/Proposed scale (Important note: this is just one of several scales being discussed.)**

4 = Exceeds expectations (advanced performance)	= A+
3.5 meets all of level 3 and approaching level 4	= A
3 = Meets expectations of standard	= B+
2.5 meets all of level 2 and approaching level 3	= B
2 = Approaching expectations of standard (prerequisites)	= C+
1.5 approaching level 2 prerequisites	= C
1 = Shows some foundational knowledge, skills or prerequisites	= D
0 = Shows no foundation knowledge, skills or prerequisites	= F

Note: with this particular scale, it is being proposed that either a C or C+ be the minimum passing grade. Not a D.

- ✓ **Students' proficiency levels are assessed and based on a pattern of achievement and then ultimately reported in a formative manner with more recent achievement having more weight:** In traditional grading, a student's performance for the whole quarter is typically averaged, including lower scores earned early in the grading period. In SBG, a student who reaches proficiency would be reported proficient and the grade would reflect **their current performance level**. This method is more accurate as it reflects what the student's current level of achievement is rather than having the grade pulled down by performance earlier in the learning period. Grading a student using this method recognizes and emphasizes the progress and learning the student has achieved over the course of the learning period.
- ✓ **Academics and behavior are assessed and reported separately:** Traditional grading often includes other subjective or behavioral factors like attendance, effort, and attitude, which may influence the grade positively or negatively. In SBG, **academic performance and work habits are reported separately** in order to give a more accurate report of student academic progress. At this time, there are discussions and plans to have a separate grade for character education/behavior and work readiness skills that will be reported along with the academic grade. This would be similar to, but more detailed than the current citizenship grade.

**Does this mean that every teacher will have to follow a script and conduct their lessons exactly the same way?** No, the system does not go into that much detail. Teachers will still have the flexibility to develop their own unit/lesson plans and determine their classroom activities and assessments that will be used to measure student learning. What will be needed is a consistent set of **Standards, Skills and Topics** for every course taught in the GDOE that are clear and easily understandable for both the teachers and students. **Proficiency Scales** like the one described earlier will be developed collaboratively by teachers based on each of these **Standards, Skills and Topics**. With these guiding documents teachers will now be better able to align all lessons, classroom activities and assessments to a common set of expectations for all students in the course and will thus, be better able to report out student levels of achievement to students and parents.

**How will Standards-Based Grading improve student learning?** The foundation of Standards-Based Grading is set in the practice of Formative Assessment, namely the process of regularly assessing and monitoring student achievement and modifying instructional strategies and approaches to support student learning. SBG encourages a shift in focus away from the accumulation of points needed to earn a certain grade to instead an awareness of what students know, understand and are able to do in reference to each specific **Standard, Skill or Topic**. Course expectations are more specific and clear, assessed and monitored closely, and will now be directly reflected in the grades students earn.

**How will this affect students with Special Needs or English learners?** Students with an IEP, 504, or English language learners will continue to receive accommodations they are eligible to receive as well as the appropriate supports and/or interventions. What is especially helpful for students with special needs and English learners is the fact that course expectations and the levels of those expectations are collaboratively developed and defined by the teachers of that course. This process naturally results in a clearer, more consistent understanding of those expectations by teachers, students, parents and any support personnel. Because of the increased focus on learning the academic content and providing appropriate supports/interventions for all, standards-based grading supports and promotes improved student achievement for all students.

**MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW:** More information will be provided to parents and students over the next few months. During SY2019-20, additional groups of teachers in all schools will be implementing the principles of SBG in their classrooms and opportunities to provide input into policy changes will be offered to all stakeholders, particularly students, parents and teachers.

For more information on Standards-Based Grading, **please contact your child's school**. For **additional questions, comments or concerns regarding SBG**, please email the project office at [sbgi@gdoe.net](mailto:sbgi@gdoe.net) or call the SBG Hotline at **300-1363** (voicemail active, so you can leave a message). You may also contact the Division of Curriculum and Instruction at 300-1635 or 1247.