

Purpose of Grading Policy

The purpose of the grading policy is to articulate the grading vision and philosophy of ACPS leaders based on the most current research in the field. Over the next several years, teachers, staff, students, and other stakeholders will work to round out the regulations and put in place grading practices that are accurate, supportive of student learning, and consistent. The key leaders in the field who we have modeled our work after are [Ken O'Connor](#), [Rick Wormeli](#), and [Joe Feldman](#).

Why?

[Superintendent Matt Haas](#) sees grading reform as the most important change lever in our two major strategic initiatives--High School Redesign and Equity and Access. Without balanced assessment systems and meaningful, consistent, and accurate grading practices we will be unable to fully realize efforts to support learning for all students. The work from the key leaders in the field show, particularly, that “no classroom can truly be equitable until we address this inequitable foundation in our schools” (Feldman, 2018). In addition, in recent surveys to [middle school](#) and [high school teachers](#) in 2019, many identified the inconsistencies in grading practices as a key challenge and asked leadership to develop a policy with guidelines to put into practice.

Grading research from EAB

Joe Feldman’s article [Accurate and Equitable Grading](#) (2020) from the National School Boards Association, highlights grading best practices found in the literature. Specifically, the piece recommends the following practices:

- Teachers should forego the zero- to 100-point scale in favor of a mathematically sound scale such as the zero- to four-point scale (in which an A=4, B=3...). The traditional scale over penalizes students for poor performance.
- Teachers should weigh recent performances more heavily to acknowledge growth and progress rather than rely on average scores across a semester to calculate a student’s final grade.
- Grades should directly reflect student knowledge as opposed to behavior or environment. In other words, teachers should not penalize students’ grades for poor behavior, attendance, or other work habits.
- Teachers should allow students multiple attempts on tests and assignments to promote a growth mindset.
- Teachers should empower students with simplified and transparent grading processes. Specifically, teachers should use detailed rubrics, simple grade calculations, and standards-based scales.

The above recommendations are corroborated by other works. EAB researchers gathered and summarized some of those resources below.

- [What’s Worth Fighting Against in Grading](#) *Educational Leadership* (2017): This piece—written by Douglas Reeves, Lee Ann Jung, and Ken O’Connor—outlines four

harmful, common grading policies that districts should avoid. The authors argue that teachers should not grade homework, should not assign missing assignments a grade of zero, should not penalize student's grades for poor behavior or late work, and should not use term averages to calculate student's final grades.

- **Grade Expectations** *Harvard Ed. Magazine* (2019): This article—also by Joe Feldman—discusses the inequities in common grading practices and outlines strategies to mitigate those inequities. Specifically, teachers and administrators should adopt the zero- to four-point grading scale, should not penalize students' grades for late work or poor behavior, and should grade solely based on student's academic performance.
- **Do No Harm: Flexible and Smart Grading Practices** *Edutopia* (2016): This article by Anthony Miller argues that students should have the opportunity to redo tests and assignments. It suggests that students should fill out a retest request form, so students take ownership over their reassessment. The author also argues teachers should not deduct points for late work or poor behavior.

Standards-Based Grading Research from EAB

Racine Unified School District (WI) began implementing standards-based grading in fall 2017. Administrators have published a parent's guide to standards-based grading [here](#). Although Racine is not located in Virginia, administrators could have helpful insights to share on how they approach change management, professional development, and assessment of the impact of standards-based grading.

Research on Competency-Based Grading

First, our research brief **Competency-Based Grading in High Schools** profiles five school districts that have transitioned to or plan to transition to competency-based grading at the secondary level. **Pages 5-9** provide a description of the implementation process for competency-based grading at profiled districts. **Page 11** describes gradebook adjustments, the most significant challenge that profiled districts face when implementing competency-based grading. The report also describes how to train teachers and communicate with parents and students when implementing competency-based grading.

Next, our researchers identified two reviews of academic literature on standards-based learning.

- In the 2009 literature review **Reforming Grading Practices in Secondary Schools**, Ken O'Connor compiles several standards-based learning best practices:
 - Grades must solely reflect achievement.
 - Summative assessments must primarily determine grades.
 - Do not numerically mark formative assessments; only comment and provide clear feedback.
 - Develop clear learning goals for teachers, students, and parents.
 - Emphasize intrinsic motivation.
- The 2016 literature review **What Does the Literature Say About Standards-Based Grading?** notes three main principles of standards-based learning:
 - Grades should have meaning.

- o Teachers should give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning.
- o Limit homework and extra-credit.

Research on the efficacy of standard-based learning at the high school level specifically is scarce. One study, **The Association between Standards-Based Grading and Standardized Test Scores in a High School Reform Model (attached)** that examined the implementation of standards-based grading across eleven large metropolitan high schools. They found that state test scores and the number of students attaining an A or B in a class doubled after implementing standards-based grading.

Our research suggests that alternative grading processes do not impact college admissions, a common concern regarding standards-based grading. For example, the **New England Secondary School Consortium** published a list of 85 universities that explicitly state that proficiency-based diplomas do not disadvantage applicants. The FAQ pages from some school districts that have implemented competency-based grading re-iterate this statement:

- **Granite School District** (UT)
- **School Administrative Unit #9** (NH)

These districts note that college admissions officers already receive a variety of transcripts, which they review alongside a school profile that describes any unique characteristics, such as competency-based grading. Most importantly, transcripts should be transparent and coherent.

Our research brief **Standards-Based Grading and College Admissions** reports similar findings. Overall, our researchers found that alternative grading systems do not impact a student's college admission—the most important factor in college admissions, regardless of grading scale, remains a student's academic record. However, standards-based grading can increase the margin for error during application review due to misinterpretation of the grading scale. Schools that convert standards-based grades to GPAs avoid this issue.

Assessment Research:

Ensuring Valid, Effective, Rigorous Assessments from the Association for Middle Level Education. This resource provides five steps to help teachers create clear and rigorous assessments:

- **Step One: Deconstruct Standards.** In the first step, teachers break each standard into its composite learning targets and align each with a level of achievement (knowledge, reasoning, processing, applying).
- **Step Two: Align Items and Levels of Thinking.** In this step, teachers select an assessment type (matching, short-answer, performance-based assessment/project) that will test each learning target. Teachers indicate which level of achievement of the

learning target each assessment item will test for, using Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's Depth of Knowledge (compare and contrast those two frameworks [here](#)).

- **Step Three: Ensure Validity and Reliability.** This step provides a table of criteria for five different assessment types (matching questions, fill-in-the blank questions, multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, essay questions) that the assessment type must meet to demonstrate validity and reliability.
- **Step Four: Elevate Rigor and Relevance.** This step describes how teachers can use Bloom's Taxonomy to improve the rigor of assessments and incorporate real-world /interdisciplinary applications to improve the relevance of assessments.
- **Step Five: Incorporate Assessments into Planning.** This step recommends that teachers create assessments before lesson plans. Though this step relates specifically to summative assessments, it may apply to some formative assessments as well.