

Grading for Learning Introduction

In an effort to ensure that staff and students are committed to doing the *right* work, we have adopted a grading for learning philosophy. The *right* work for teachers is to identify what students should know and be able to do; communicate those expectations in student friendly terms; develop instructional strategies that focus on helping students to meet those expectations; develop assessment strategies to effectively identify current levels of student understanding; provide specific feedback that identifies where students are currently and what they need to do to improve; and to provide multiple methods for students to demonstrate their current level of achievement. Students are expected to do their *right* work by completing assignments, monitoring their own progress, being engaged by using feedback to improve understanding, and taking advantage of opportunities to demonstrate understanding. By doing the *right* work *together*, students will be prepared for their post-secondary endeavors.

Student Expectations: How will my child know what-he/she is supposed to learn?

The McFarland School District has determined that the goal of grades is to communicate the learning, growth, and achievement of individual students in relation to important academic standards with a focus on the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and communication.

In an effort to promote accurate, meaningful, and consistent communication to students and parents, teachers will supply students with all of the following:

- Clearly defined learning criteria for successfully completing a course or grade level, including how grades are determined.
 - This will be accomplished by providing students with student-friendly unit plans that clearly define the skills to be assessed, by articulating the methods students will use to demonstrate understanding, and by detailing the required concepts to be understood.
- Detailed explanations regarding what a student should know and be able to do at a point in time.
- Feedback explaining what his or her next steps are to grow.

Teachers will provide students with detailed rubrics that clearly explain the expectations required to demonstrate mastery for each assessment.

What have we done so far?

Professional Development and Research on grading and assessment

Over the past three years, several teachers and all of the administrators at MHS have attended a conference led by the late Rick DuFour that taught us how to work as a Professional Learning Community. These teachers have learned how to collaborate around four basic questions:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if they meet these expectations?
3. What do we do for those who can't?
4. What do we do for those who already can?

It is through discussing these four questions that we have decided to focus our assessment or grading strategies on learning the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and communication rather than on "earning points."

Several teachers have attended assessment conferences led by Myron Dueck, Rick Wormeli, and our local CESA offices. Administrators have also attended these conferences so that we are able to work together, use common terminology, and have a shared vision.

Improved our grading and assessment practices

During the summer of 2016, the entire staff at MHS read Ken O'Connor's "A Repair Kit for Grading: Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades". Our Building Leadership met with teachers and agreed to six initiatives to implement during the 2016-17 school year. These initiatives are:

1. Only include academic achievement in the final grade.
2. Create clear descriptions of expected academic achievement.
3. Rely on quality assessments.
4. Allow student multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding, but not allow extra-credit to earn points.
5. Do not compare academic achievement to other students.
6. Include students in the grading process.

Based on the progress, we will continue to implement these initiatives as a staff for the 2017-18 school year.

Staff members asked to visit schools who are currently implementing grading for learning, so over 15 teachers visited three different area schools that have demonstrated an advanced knowledge of grading for learning.

More than 20 teachers piloted variations of grading for learning during the 2016-17 school year, and more are doing so during the 2017-18 school year. These teachers are continuously sharing their experiences in their classrooms and are adapting as needed to meet the needs of our students.

The Student Advisory Group, 20 students representing each grade at MHS, meet with Mr. Finstad every two weeks and provide feedback regarding their observations of the initiatives. This group has reviewed the grading scales, student friendly unit plans, communication, conduct and effort grade, and overall rollout of grading for learning.

Throughout this entire time, staff members are sharing the results of their work.

Why are we moving to standards-based grading and assessment practices?

The staff at MHS has a goal for all students to learn more, no matter if the student struggles or is gifted. All of our students can learn more. Our own mission statement reads, "McFarland High School believes all students are intelligent, creative, and capable of growing and learning." We strongly believe that this learning will occur if the focus on earning points is removed and our students are able to focus what they need to know or be able to do. We believe our focus needs to be on creating common expectations that focus on academics. It is imperative that we deliver a guaranteed and viable curriculum to all students, no matter who that student has for a teacher. In other words, all students will meet the same targets no matter the teacher, and all students will learn at deep levels. Grading for learning allows for the following:

Accuracy: Basing a student's grade on assessments of learning allows the teacher to create a clearer picture of what the student has learned without the influence of other, non-academic factors. These

other factors, such as effort and behavior, are still essential but are not part of the student's academic grade and are communicated separately.

Consistency: For each outcome, the teacher provides a proficiency scale that describes exactly what the student should know or be able to do. Proficiency scales identify criteria for proficiency and are used consistently throughout the unit and semester.

Meaningfulness: A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates the learning that has taken place. In a grading for learning classroom, scores are recorded by the learning outcomes rather than by categories, such as tests or homework. This makes it easier to identify areas of strength and areas of growth.

More support for ongoing learning: Grading for learning supports student learning by focusing on demonstrated proficiency and enrichment with intervention as needed. The reassessment policy supports student learning by allowing new levels of learning to replace the old when a student demonstrates improvement on an assessment.

What have we learned?

We have learned that this is not going to be an easy transition, but it is needed so that we can achieve our goal of more students learning more. We have learned that it is going to continue to take collaboration to identify the exact policies and procedures that create a culture for students to learn the needed skills and knowledge to succeed in their post-secondary journey. We have learned that we need to review what we want our students to know and be able to do, and we have to create a more effective way to communicate those goals to students as well as create effective and authentic assessments that measure students higher level thinking skills. We have learned that we need to teach students to focus on learning, not earning, and that is going to take a joint effort from all stakeholders to teach these skills. We have learned that we need to define our common expectations and agree on what those expectations really are. We have learned that we need to figure out how to use Infinite Campus effectively so we can communicate more effectively to both students and parents.

What steps are we taking next?

In an effort to create a systemic process that creates grading consistency as well opportunities for interventions and enrichment opportunities, we have created focus groups:

1. Common Grading Scale
2. Conduct and Effort Grade

The **Common Grading Scale** focus group has been charged with two goals: establishing a common grading scale for all grading for learning pilot classes, and defining what it means to earn each grade. These are the two grading scales we will be using:

4 Point Scale

Total Points Scale

Points	Grade	Grade	Percentage
4	A	A	92.5-100%
3.5	A/B	A/B	87.5-92.4%
3	B	B	82.5-87.4%
2.5	B/C	B/C	77.5-82.4%
2	C	C	72.5-77.4%
1.5	C/D	C/D	67.5-72.4%
1	D	D	60%-67.4%
0	F	F	Below 60%

The **Conduct and Effort** focus group has identified the non-academic skills that need to be taught and assessed, defined expectations, and created a rubric that provides feedback to students and parents. This is the rubric that will be used:

Category	Component	Exceeds (4)	Meets (3)	Partially Meets (2)	Does Not Meet (1)
Prompt & Prepared	<i>Brings Materials to Class on Time</i>	Comes to school with necessary materials & is willing to share resources	Comes to school with materials	Inconsistently comes to class with necessary materials	Rarely or never comes to class with necessary materials
	<i>Meets Deadlines</i>	Meets deadlines & is proactive when absent	Meets deadlines	Inconsistently meets deadlines	Rarely or never meets deadlines
	<i>Arrives on Time</i>	No unexcused tardies or absences	1 unexcused tardy & no unexcused absences	2 unexcused tardies or 1 unexcused absence	3 or more unexcused tardies or 2 or more unexcused absences
Polite & Positive	<i>Displays Positive Attitude</i>	Consistently exhibits a positive can-do attitude	<i>Displays Positive Attitude</i>	Inconsistently demonstrates a positive attitude	Attitude trends towards negativity
	<i>Demonstrates Academic Honesty</i>	Always abides by the school academic honesty policy.		Demonstrates 1 or more instances of academic dishonesty	
	<i>Acts with Integrity and Respect both in person & online</i>	Demonstrates consideration & respect for self & others; encourages peers to do the same	<i>Acts with Integrity and Respect both in person & online</i>	Inconsistently demonstrates consideration & respect for self & others	Rarely demonstrates consideration & respect for self & others
	<i>Follows school & classroom expectations in person & with devices</i>	Meets all behavioral expectations without reminders	<i>Follows school & classroom expectations in person & w/ devices</i>	Inconsistently meets behavior expectations, or needs frequent reminders	Rarely or never meets behavior expectations

Persistent & Productive	<i>Maximizes instructional time including appropriate use of technology</i>	Appropriately manages class time with productive results for self & others	Appropriately manages class time with productive results for self	Inconsistently manages class time & sometimes disrupts the learning of others	Rarely or never manages class time or frequently disrupts the learning of others
	<i>Is collaborative</i>	Works well with all peers; seeks out opportunities to include others	Works well with all peers	Works well with select peers	Rarely works well with peers
	<i>Takes Initiative/Actively participates</i>	Independently seeks resources to assist productivity. Consistently prepares for & participates in class.	Needs minimal assistance to obtain resources. Usually prepares for & participates in class.	Relies on others to find resources. Occasionally prepares for & participates in class.	Does not utilize resources. Rarely prepares for & participates in class.

Essential Learning Outcomes: What will my child learn?

Students need to master local grade-level or course benchmarks (or standards) that have been collaboratively determined by McFarland School District teachers. State and national standards documents are used as resources to shape our local essential learning outcomes. *Mastery* implies that students will have multiple opportunities throughout the school year to demonstrate that they are learning the skills and knowledge expressed in the learning outcomes. Therefore, it is not expected that a student is able to master all of the benchmarks early in a learning period; rather, a student is given the necessary time and support to develop mastery of the benchmarks before being assessed.

Most recent level of achievement: By when will my child learn it?

Students will be assessed on a set of course standards throughout the grading period. Each assessment will be used as evidence to determine the student's current level of mastery in each standard on a 1-4 scale, with instructors looking for trends that show a growth in understanding and ability. In general, the most recent piece of evidence will carry more weight. At the end of each reporting period, instructors will assess the current level of mastery students have demonstrated on each standard, and compute an average which will determine the overall grade in the class.

Multiple opportunities: How will my child learn it?

In the Grading for Learning Model, students will be supported in doing the work and in learning, and they will be given multiple opportunities in demonstrating that learning. Students and teachers may set up retakes for graded assessments, revision opportunities on papers, or other opportunities for the student to demonstrate that learning has been mastered. Teachers may also set up “spiraled” assessments that give students additional opportunities to show how their learning has progressed over time.

Practice: What is the difference between practicing and being graded?

Grading for Learning clarifies the difference between when students are practicing their learning (formative assessment) and when they are being graded on their learning (summative assessment). In the Grading for Learning Model, students are encouraged to practice frequently, to learn from that practice, to receive specific feedback, and to understand how that practice supports their successful performance when being graded.

Communicating Student Performance: How will I know how my child is doing?

The Grading for Learning Model helps your child's teachers identify and communicate your child's specific strengths and areas for improvement. This should help your child and you better understand how they are progressing in their learning and what they need to do to improve.

The Grading for Learning Model has an impact on how the Infinite Campus Gradebook will look to you. The grades (or scores) in a course will no longer be organized by assessments (tests, projects, quizzes, etc.). They will be organized by Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). ELOs are those important skills and concepts that teachers have agreed all students should master in a given course or at a given grade level. Organizing grades by ELO's helps you understand how your child is progressing in mastering essential skills and concepts. Also, the grades that your child will receive on assessments will come from a four-point, equal-interval grading scale. We're using this scale because it aligns with four-point rubrics that teachers use to describe varied levels of student performance.

The most valuable resource in learning about the changes in grading will be your child's teachers. They will be able to give you more detailed information on the Grading for Learning Model in the specific context of your child's classes.

Please note that students will still receive a letter grade (A, A/B, B, B/C etc.) for each of their courses. There will be no changes to GPAs (grade point averages), high school transcripts, or the college admissions process.

Resources:

[Grades That Show What Students Know](#)

["Panel: Ditch Grades Now, Focus on Student Learning](#)

[7 Reasons](#) for SBG

[Response: 'The Grading System We Need to Have'](#)

Parent University- [February](#)

Videos

Standard Based Grading [Overview](#)

[Rick Wormeli: Standards Based Grading](#)

Rick Wormeli: [SBG Part I](#)

Wormeli: [Part II](#)

Wormeli: [Part III](#)