

Dear CHA Parents,

In a little over two weeks, first trimester report cards will arrive, and like just about everything else in 2020, and they will not look at all the same as what our families have become accustomed to seeing. As you know, we have committed fully to a transition from traditional grading practices to a standards-based grading (SBG) system.

We have made this commitment with a strong conviction that doing so is the right decision for our students. A single grade for Language Arts (LA), for example, is not especially meaningful when meant to represent a wide variety of skills and aptitudes, from reading to writing to listening to speaking. Now, with SBG, teachers, parents, and students are all afforded a holistic understanding of performance across the entirety of the learning continuum.

To further exemplify this point, consider the area of literary reading, one of the seven LA categories that will appear on the report card. It is subdivided into four specific subcategories, and each will be assessed over the course of the school year. This level of detail will certainly go a long way towards helping our students to become better aware of their *specific* strengths, as well as their areas of growth. They will learn to see the broad subject of LA as one that includes myriad opportunities to demonstrate their aptitude.

Sticking with the LA example, traditional grading does not allow for a student who is, for example, highly proficient as a reader but challenged in the area of writing to earn a grade that reflects this dichotomy. Furthermore, when writing is subdivided into manageable, specific subcategories, students are able to better monitor their progress and growth, celebrating successes along the way. Teachers and students become better able to collaborate and otherwise focus on specific learning and growth, as well as ways to resiliently push through areas of challenge.

When you receive the first-trimester report card, understand that it is a rather remarkable and important deviation from a grading system that is rapidly being replaced all over the country for the reasons enumerated above and many others. We have determined that SBG is what our students, staff, and families need most in order to effectively guide our teaching and learning at CHA.

On the report card, it is important to bear in mind that grades are often simply snapshots of where students are relative to the various standards at that very moment in the school year. Some standards will have been taught and assessed in their entirety by then, while others will be introduced, taught, retaught, expanded upon, etc. over the course of the entire year, so a student may have only been exposed to half or less of the standard's learning objectives by the time at which grades are due to be reported. In those situations, it is impossible for a teacher to ascertain that any student is performing at a level of 3 or 4 since no student will have been assessed relative to the *entire* standard. In these cases, a score of 1 or 2 is not necessarily indicative of any deficiency but rather a reflection of much more work to be done in the classroom as the class continues the exciting work of meeting the given standard.

With your report card, you will also receive a supplement explaining the scores and how they were derived. If a standard is not yet complete, that will be stated on the supplement, along with how the scoring will be affected. It is important that you use the supplement while reading the report card because there very well may be instances in which a student has a score of 1 in a given graded area, but the highest possible score is a 1 or 2 at this time, which will be explained on the supplement. You will also find answers to frequently asked

questions (FAQ) on each supplement. Where the explanations related to the report card scoring are unique to each grade and to specific classes. The FAQs are universal to the whole school, so the same questions and responses will appear on all supplements.

In short, trimester grades will no longer be based upon percentages derived from homework scores and averages of quizzes, tests, projects, and other formal assessments. Going forward, these grades will instead be determined by formal assessments and often multiple assessments per standard that provide the most to-date information related to where students “exist” in their journey towards specific standards. It will allow everyone to know exactly what each student can do and understands and what can be done to improve in both areas.

Finally, it is very important to view this first report card with an understanding that there are likely to be many standards that have not been taught and learned to completion in this relatively short span of time.

I am including this chart to summarize the differences between Standards Based Grading and traditional methods.

How is Standards-Based Grading different than traditional grading?

Traditional Systems	Standards-Based Systems
Grades given by subject as an average of all assignments. Percentage system (101 levels) is used with incomplete assignments (zeros) having a disproportional effect.	Grades given by reporting standards, reported separately. Three levels of reporting that only consider the evidence produced.
Criteria for success is often unclear or assumed to be known by students.	Publicly published criteria for success.
Letter grades are a mix of achievement, attitude, effort, and behavior. Penalties, extra credit, and group scores are included.	Reporting levels indicate the degree of achievement on each reporting standard. Achievement and effort are reported separately. Only individual evidence is used.
Curriculum and instruction are teacher centered, textbook driven, and may not be aligned to the standards. (teaching focused)	Curriculum and instruction are student centered and aligned to standards. (learning focused)
All assignments included, regardless of purpose. Homework completion can be a major factor.	Only those assignments which come at the end of learning (summative) are included. Assignments which are part of the learning process (formative) are used for feedback and planning instruction, not grading.
All scores from the grading period included. Multiple assessments recorded as average.	Most recent evidence emphasized and students are able to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways.
Mean is the primary way grades are “calculated.”	Grades are “determined” using professional judgement, relying on the median, mode, or most recent.

Adapted from O’Connor, K. (2009). How to grade for learning, k-12. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Sincerely,

Derek Heinz, Assistant Principal