



INFORMATION CAPSULE

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STANDARDS-BASED GRADING SYSTEMS

At a Glance

An increasing number of school districts across the U.S. are introducing standards-based grading and report cards. Standards-based grading systems divide each content area into a list of specific standards and assign students a separate grade for each standard. This Information Capsule summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of standards-based grading systems. Research on standards-based grading systems' impact on student achievement is reviewed. Because so few studies have been conducted, however, researchers have not yet drawn any conclusions regarding what, if any, impact standards-based grading systems have on student achievement. This report also summarizes practices that have led to successful transitions to standards-based grading systems, based on the experiences of school districts around the country. Finally, a listing of 10 U.S. school districts and one state (Hawaii) that are using standards-based report cards is provided, including websites where information and sample report cards can be obtained for each location.

In many U.S. schools and districts, student grades and report cards look much the same as they did a century ago, listing a single grade for each subject area or course. However, with the increased focus on standards-based education, more and more school districts are introducing standards-based grading and report cards. Standards-based grading systems divide each content area into a list of specific skills (standards) and assign students a separate grade for each standard. The purpose of standards-based grading systems is to provide more detailed feedback about the progress students are making toward specific content indicators at each grade level (Craig, 2011; Guskey, 2011; Oliver, 2011; O'Connor, 2009; Great Schools, 2008; Muir, 2005).

Advantages of Standards-Based Grading Practices

Advocates of standards-based grading systems claim that they have many advantages over systems using traditional letter grades. The advantages cited by supporters of standards-based grading systems are summarized below.

- **Students have access to more information about their learning.** Standards-based grading provides students with a clear understanding of what needs to be learned and what constitutes successful performance. Each lesson has a specific set of standards attached to precise levels of mastery (McGee, 2012; Ohio Department of Education, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Scriffiny, 2008).

- **Instruction can be adjusted more effectively.** Teachers have information related to students' performance on each standard, enabling them to produce a profile of strengths and weaknesses for each student. Struggling students can be identified early and provided with the targeted assistance they need in order to master the standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2012; Oliver, 2011; O'Connor & Cooper, 2008; Scriffiny, 2008).
- **Reporting on academic outcomes is more accurate.** In standards-based grading systems, students' grades are based solely on their levels of academic achievement. In contrast, traditional grading systems require teachers to combine diverse types of information such as achievement, homework completion rates, effort, participation, attitude, and attendance into a single grade. The resulting grades are difficult to interpret and rarely provide a true picture of students' proficiency. For example, a student might have received a grade of "B," not because he or she had a firm grasp of the content, but because he or she was well behaved in class, participated in discussions, and turned in all assignments on time (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Walker, 2006).
- **Parents appreciate the detailed information.** Although most school districts initially meet with resistance from parents over the new report card format, researchers have found that once parents become familiar with the standards-based grading system, they tend to prefer the new approach because they appreciate the more detailed information. Traditional letter grades do not tell parents which skills their children have mastered or the specific areas in which they need additional support (McGee, 2012; Great Schools, 2008; Guskey & Jung, 2006).
- **Teachers are more consistent in their assignment of grades.** In standards-based grading systems, the same performance is more likely to result in the same grade from different teachers of the same subject or grade level. On the other hand, traditional grades are much less likely to be consistent from one teacher to the next. One teacher's criteria for assigning a letter grade of "A," for example, might be equivalent to another teacher's criteria for assigning a letter grade of "B" or even lower (McGee, 2012; Urich, 2012; Guskey et al., 2011; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; O'Connor & Cooper, 2008).

McMillan and Nash (2000) conducted a study on the decision-making process related to classroom teachers' assignment of traditional letter grades. The researchers reported, "Teachers adopted their own grading policy, with little regard for standardization with other teachers" and concluded that assignment of grades was a "highly individualized, idiosyncratic process." Whitney and colleagues' (cited in Urich, 2012) survey of 200 first-year teachers found that 100% of respondents stated that they felt unprepared in the area of grading.

- **Students are measured against their mastery of the standards, not their standing among classmates.** In standards-based grading systems, teachers judge students' performance in terms of what they have learned and are able to do, regardless of how well or poorly their classmates perform. In traditional grading systems, grades are based on students' standing among classmates. These grades reveal very little about what students have learned. Students receiving high grades might actually have performed very poorly in terms of established learning standards, but simply less poorly than their classmates (Adrian, 2012; Urich, 2012; Guskey, 2011; Phillips, 2011; O'Connor, 2007a; Guskey, 2001a; Guskey, 2001b; Krumboltz & Yeh, 1996).

- **Standards-based grading removes competition from the classroom.** In traditional grading systems, students compete against one another for the few high grades that the teacher distributes. As a result, the learning process becomes a competitive activity, discouraging students from cooperating or helping each other because doing so might hurt their chances of success (Urich, 2012; Guskey, 2011).
- **Standards-based grading systems can be part of an effort to close the achievement gap.** Experts contend that the lack of a clear standards-based curriculum disproportionately harms low-income and minority students. Standards-based grading systems allow educators to monitor whether all students, regardless of their ethnicity and income level, are learning the required skills at each grade level. In school districts with high rates of student mobility, standards-based grading also ensures that children will not be left behind academically because of a move to a new school (Ohio Department of Education, 2012; Brookhart, 2011; Craig, 2011; Paeplow, 2011; Great Schools, 2008).

Disadvantages of Standards-Based Grading Practices

Several disadvantages associated with standards-based grading practices have been identified. Critics note that school districts must address the following areas of concern before moving forward with the transition to standards-based grading systems.

- **Parents are initially confused by the standards-based report card format.** Letter grades make more sense to parents because those are the grades they received when they were in school (Beaver, 2012; Roscorla, 2012; Urich, 2012; Craig, 2011; Staly, 2011; Hagen, 2009; Guskey & Jung, 2006). Contreras (2004) noted, “Many districts have switched from traditional grading systems to align student report cards with state standards. Each district has its own method of measuring students. Each change has caused confusion among parents.”
- **Many teachers claim that standards-based grading increases their workload.** Standards-based grading requires teachers to spend more time planning each unit, organizing evidence of mastery, and calculating grades at the conclusion of each marking period. Additionally, teachers usually need to spend extra classroom time explaining the new grading practices to students (Adrian, 2012; Roscorla, 2012; Guskey, 2011; Hagen, 2009). Staly (2011) reported that the retesting of students, which is a common feature of standards-based grading systems, increases teachers’ workloads by 10% or more.
- **Standards-based grading practices can lead to reduced student motivation.** Critics argue that standards-based grades discourage students from trying hard because they are not as motivated to strive for a “P” (Proficient) as they are to work for an “A.” One Albuquerque, New Mexico parent contended that a standards-based grading system “teaches kids just to try for the minimum. Do you really want our future doctors and engineers just trying to pass?” (Staly, 2011; Contreras, 2004).
- **Teachers cannot implement standards-based grading systems until they have received extensive training in such systems.** Standards-based grades are very different from traditional letter grades. Therefore, teachers need a substantial amount of professional development in order to understand the standards, align assessments with the standards, and master new record keeping systems (Adrian, 2012; Brookhart, 2011; Erickson, 2011; Staly, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009; Hagen, 2009).

Some studies have found that without training, teachers struggle to articulate what constitutes each level of achievement in standards-based grading systems. For example, Sarazen (cited in Paepflow, 2008) surveyed 400 randomly selected K-5 teachers in the Wake County Public School System regarding the assignment of standards-based grades. While 94% of the teachers reported that they understood the knowledge and skills students should demonstrate at each performance level, 67% of teachers incorrectly reported the criteria required for the highest level. The misidentification of criteria was more prevalent among first year teachers than their more experienced peers (75% versus 55%, respectively).

- **At the high school level, students need traditional grade point averages and transcripts for their college and university applications.** For this reason, many school districts have resisted the move toward a standards-based grading system at the secondary level. Since standards-based grades do not easily convert to grade point averages, some researchers suggest that districts issue high school report cards with both traditional and standards-based grades. Aurora Public Schools in Colorado issues standards-based high school report cards, but translates the grades into traditional letter grades for colleges and universities (Young, 2012; Reeves, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009; Great Schools, 2008; O'Connor, 2007b).

Research Conducted on the Impact of Standards-Based Grading on Student Achievement

Although advocates of standards-based grading systems maintain that they have a positive impact on student achievement, few studies have been conducted to verify this claim (Urich, 2012). In general, studies have found that effective grading practices have a positive effect on student achievement (Reeves, 2011). Researchers hypothesize that the reason standards-based grading systems are likely to lead to higher levels of student achievement is that they provide families, students, and teachers with more information about student progress along a continuum of learning than traditional grading systems (Urich, 2012; Scriffany, 2008; Marzano, cited in Scherer, 2001). However, one recent study (Craig, 2011) found no significant difference in math achievement between students attending schools that used one overall letter grade for each content area and students attending schools that used standards-based report cards. In sum, more studies are needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding what, if any, impact standards-based grading systems have on students' academic achievement.

Best Practices in Standards-Based Grading

There does not appear to be one single best way to transition to standards-based grading systems (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). However, the experiences of school districts around the U.S. indicate that the following practices can lead to successful implementation of standards-based grading systems:

- **Districts engage in thoughtful and inclusive planning before implementing standards-based grading systems.** Prior to full-scale implementation of standards-based grading systems, teachers and parents must be given opportunities to learn about changes to the grading system, ask questions, and seek clarification. Some districts pilot standards-based grading systems before moving to districtwide implementation in order to build support for the initiative and obtain feedback from teachers and parents to guide its development (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2012; Urich, 2012; Young, 2012; Aurora Public Schools, 2011; Eaker & Keating, 2011; Staly, 2011; Hagen, 2009; Everitt, 2005).

- **Students are involved in the transition to standards-based grading.** The transition to a standards-based grading system is more successful when students understand how their grades will be determined, have input into the criteria for success, and are allowed, at appropriate points, to make some choices about how they demonstrate their learning (O'Connor & Cooper, 2008). The California Department of Education (2011) recommended that teachers engage in the following activities in order to educate students about the new grading policies:
 - write the standard for each day's lesson on the board or in another visible location;
 - tie each lesson to a specific standard;
 - illustrate the range of performance within each proficiency level; and
 - provide written commentary on assignments and assessments so that students understand what is required for them to move up to the next proficiency level.

- **Parents are educated about the standards-based grading system.** Districts have found that parents do not accept standards-based grading systems until they have a full understanding of the process. Most parents were raised with traditional grading practices so it is natural for them to initially resist the grading changes. Districts must communicate with parents to ensure that they are able to easily interpret their children's standards-based report cards. Parents need to know precisely what the standards mean and how the various levels of performance relate to those standards (Urich, 2012; O'Connor, 2007b; Guskey, 2001a). Recommendations for educating parents include:
 - sending information home to parents via fliers and newsletters, explaining standards-based grading and the transition process;
 - posting information and frequently asked questions about the standards-based grading system on the district's website;
 - holding meetings in which parents can ask questions and obtain additional information;
 - creating talking points for teachers and principals so there is common language used across the district regarding standards-based grading practices; and
 - asking teachers to field questions when they hold parent-teacher conferences (Adrian, 2012; McGee, 2012; Urich, 2012).

- **Districts identify the standards that will be graded in each subject and grade level.** Every state has adopted its own list of skills that students should learn at each grade level from K-12. However, Adrian (2012) noted that educators often struggle to fully understand their state's standards because "in most states, standards are either vague, unrealistically extensive, or overly specific." In addition, report cards become cumbersome to use and difficult to understand when they include every standard in every content area (O'Connor, 2009; Great Schools, 2008; Guskey, 2001a). Researchers have found that school districts have the most success transitioning to standards-based grading systems when educators first resolve the following issues:
 - A limited number of standards are selected for inclusion in the report card. Districts must determine which standards are essential, often called "power standards." Since students cannot possibly be held accountable for all standards, most experts recommend holding students responsible for selected standards in the basic content areas, such as reading, writing, and mathematics (Craig, 2011; Eaker & Keating, 2011; Hagen, 2009; O'Connor, 2007b; Marzano, 1996).

- The level of detail that will be included in the description of each standard is decided upon before a grading system is adopted. Standards that are too specific result in report cards that are time-consuming for teachers to complete and difficult for parents to understand. Standards that are too broad, however, make it hard to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Researchers note that educators must seek a balance: standards must be specific enough to provide parents with useful information, but broad enough to allow for efficient communication of student learning (Guskey, 2001a).
- User-friendly descriptions of each standard are written. Above all, parents must be able to easily understand the information contained in standards-based report cards. The description of each standard on the report card should be brief, with expanded versions easily accessible on the district's website or in other published materials (O'Connor & Cooper, 2008).
- **Non-achievement factors are reported separately.** Absences, tardies, homework completion rates, attitude, behavior, compliance, and effort should not be included in the calculation of achievement grades. Experts suggest that standards-based report cards contain one section for achievement and one section for non-achievement factors, often labeled "Effort," "Work Habits," or "Behavior" (Erickson, 2011; O'Connor, 2009; Scryfall, 2008; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Allen, 2005).

When non-achievement factors are included in students' achievement grades, it is often difficult to interpret the grades. For example, some students may have achieved at a low level but received inflated grades because they tried hard and behaved well; other students may have achieved at a high level but received deflated grades because they did not exhibit the desired behaviors. In addition, although there is some subjectivity involved in all grading, factors such as effort and attitude are more open to personal interpretation than achievement measures and are therefore more difficult to assign objectively (O'Connor & Cooper, 2008; Vandalia-Butler City School District, 2008).

- **Recent achievement is emphasized.** Traditional grading systems average student performance across the entire grading period, giving equal weight to early low scores and more recent higher scores. This calculation method usually results in lower grades since students continue to learn as the grading period progresses. In contrast, standards-based grading systems replace early scores with the most recent evidence of achievement. Researchers maintain that emphasizing recent achievement is a more accurate method of assigning grades because learning is developmental and grows over time with teacher feedback and repeated opportunities to reach mastery (Adrian, 2012; Erickson, 2011; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Oliver, 2011; O'Connor, 2007a; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005). Urich (2012) stated, "Not altering grades in the light of new evidence of learning sends the message that the assessment is really a measure of aptitude rather than achievement."
- **Educators only include evidence from summative assessments.** Summative assessments measure students' mastery of the standards at particular points in time and include state assessments, end-of-course exams, interim assessments, and class projects. Formative assessments are used as diagnostic measures of students' learning and include initial drafts, quizzes, homework, and questioning during instruction. Traditional grading systems include students' scores on both formative and summative assessments. They give almost every assignment, test, or quiz students complete a

score and every score is included in the final grade. In contrast, standards-based grading systems only use evidence from summative assessments to determine students' grades. Formative assessments are not included in the calculation of standards-based grades but instead are administered throughout the grading period in order to provide feedback to students and give teachers the opportunity to adjust instruction (Roscorla, 2012; Urich, 2012; Oliver, 2011; O'Connor, 2009; Guskey, 2001a).

- **Grading scales contain four or five performance levels.** Guskey and Bailey (2010) recommended that standards-based report cards include four or five performance levels with two lower levels of performance to provide scaffolding opportunities for those students who have not yet reached proficiency and one level higher than proficiency to "recognize those students who display truly exceptional accomplishment or skill with regard to the standard." Most districts use a proficiency scale that ranges from one to four. Examples of proficiency scales include "Beginning, Progressing, Proficient, and Exceptional" and "Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced." Experts recommend that performance levels include language such as "beginning," "approaching," or "not yet" because it helps students understand that they have not failed, but are moving along a continuum (Urich, 2012; Craig, 2011; Reeves, 2011; O'Connor, 2007a).

Researchers discourage the use of percentage-based grading scales - they inaccurately imply that teachers can consistently identify 101 levels of performance (Urich, 2012; O'Connor & Cooper, 2008; Scriffiny, 2008). Researchers agree that it does not matter whether performance levels are labeled with numbers or letters because it is the descriptions that make the performance levels meaningful to teachers, students, and parents. It is imperative that districts create descriptions of each proficiency level that are clear, concise, and easy for students, parents, and teachers to understand (Heflebower, 2012; Great Schools, 2008; O'Connor & Cooper, 2008; Guskey, 2001a).

Districts are encouraged to use the same performance level descriptions at each grade level so parents do not have to learn how to interpret a new grading scale each year. However, districts usually grade students on different sets of standards at each grade level. This gives parents a clear picture of the increasing complexity of the standards at each succeeding grade level (Guskey, 2001a).

One of the biggest adjustments for students and parents is that standards-based report cards focus on end-of-the-year goals. This means that in the first or second grading period, high-achieving students may receive grades of "Below Basic" or "Beginning," indicating that they are making appropriate progress but are not yet proficient in some skills. Although this is to be expected since most students will not meet all of the year's goals in the first two grading periods, these marks concern many parents who are used to seeing all "A"s and "B"s on their children's report cards (Howell Township Public Schools, 2012; McGee, 2012; Great Schools, 2008; Guskey, 2001a).

- **Homework assignments are not included in the calculation of standards-based achievement grades.** Homework is a significant part of the traditional grading system, especially in middle and high schools. However, students' homework grades are usually based on whether or not they completed the assignments, not their mastery of content area standards. Many districts therefore include a grade for homework completion in the "Effort," "Work Habits," or other non-achievement section of their standards-based report cards (O'Connor, 2007b; Guskey & Jung, 2006; Walker, 2006).

- **Students are provided with opportunities to retake assessments.** Standards-based grading systems do not assume that every student will arrive at the same point on the learning continuum with a particular skill at the same moment in time. Instead, they recognize that every student learns at a different pace and in a different way and therefore deserves multiple opportunities to demonstrate success (Roscorla, 2012; Urich, 2012).

Additional instruction (such as after-school classes, tutoring, or Saturday school) must occur before students are granted an opportunity to retest. Some researchers suggest that an “opportunity cost” be attached to retests (for example, having retests administered outside of class time) to help students recognize that it is better to put maximum effort into a test the first time it is administered (Erickson, 2011; O’Connor, 2007a).

It should be noted that some educators argue against allowing students to retest. They claim that this practice pampers students, promotes procrastination, and does not reflect conditions in the real world. They also point out that students frequently do not do their best work when first tested if they know they will be allowed to retest (Erickson, 2011; Staly, 2011).

- **Students do not receive failing grades for late or incomplete work.** Assignment of failing grades for late or incomplete assignments is usually an attempt to teach responsibility, but the failing grades are not an accurate reflection of students’ true mastery of skills and knowledge. Failing grades, especially zeros, do not build students’ belief in their ability to learn content and have a damaging impact on student motivation (Craig, 2011; Reeves, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009; O’Connor, 2007a; Guskey, 2001b).

Standards-based grading systems address late or incomplete assignments in one of several ways:

- Teachers assign a grade of “Incomplete,” with explicit timelines and requirements for completing the work. The message communicated to both students and parents is that the missing work must be submitted before the grade can be determined (Urich, 2012; Cooper et al., 2009; O’Connor & Cooper, 2008; Guskey, 2001b).
 - Students’ achievement grades are not lowered when assignments are incomplete; instead, missing work is addressed in sections of the report card that focus on effort or work habits. Students are required to complete all assignments before teachers determine their academic grades (Urich, 2012; Guskey, 2011; Reeves, 2011; O’Connor, 2007a).
 - Teachers have flexible due dates for the submission of student work. They recognize that students may complete assignments at different times. Their priority changes from strict due dates to flexible due dates that allow for consistently high-quality work. Students must complete all assignments before teachers make final grade determinations (Roscorla, 2012; Oliver, 2011).
- **Report cards are released three to four times per year.** Most school districts have concluded that standards-based report cards should be issued three or four times per year - often enough to provide parents with timely information but not so frequently that

reporting overwhelms them and overburdens teachers (O'Connor & Cooper, 2008; also see next section).

- **Teachers are provided with high-quality professional development.** School districts must provide training so that all teachers are able to successfully transition to standards-based grading practices. High-quality training should be followed by coaching and mentoring in individual classrooms (Adrian, 2012; Urich, 2012; Erickson, 2011; Staly, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009). Recommended professional development activities include:
 - helping teachers develop the skills needed to differentiate instructional avenues to the standards so that most students can reach proficiency;
 - helping teachers identify assessments that measure mastery of the standards;
 - giving teachers the opportunity to practice determining grades, using their own classroom data;
 - providing teachers with frequent opportunities to engage in collaboration with their peers in order to create and maintain consistency across the district regarding standards-based grading;
 - sharing tips and strategies with teachers regarding time management and mastering new record keeping systems; and
 - providing teachers with alternate strategies for motivating students in order to support the practice of eliminating failing grades (Adrian, 2012; Brookhart, 2011; Hagen, 2009).

- **Teachers receive administrative support.** Researchers agree that active engagement and support from district and school administrators is valued by teachers who are transitioning to standards-based grading practices. They note that teacher buy-in is essential to the transition process (Urich, 2012; Staly, 2011). Eaker and Keating (2011) stated that administration should work in tandem with teachers to develop and implement standards-based grading practices or teachers will “simply be giving a new name to their traditional [grading] practices.” Districts should also ensure that teachers have access to a reporting tool that is optimized to provide standards-based information to parents and students (Urich, 2012; Hagen, 2009).

Listing of 10 U.S. School Districts and One State (Hawaii) Using Standards-Based Report Cards

Hundreds of school districts across the country are implementing standards-based grading systems. The following list includes a sample of 10 school districts and one state (Hawaii) that are using standards-based report cards. A website where detailed information and sample standards-based report cards can be obtained is provided for each location.

The report cards used in all of the locations listed below share several similarities. All report cards

- are sent to parents three or four times per school year;
- have a performance scale with three to five proficiency levels;
- assign separate grades for effort and other non-achievement factors;
- contain a section that displays the number of days students were absent and tardy within each grading period; and
- include an area for teachers' narrative comments. (Teachers are provided with space to highlight the most significant aspects of each student's achievement and behavior, identify student strengths and areas in need of improvement, and offer suggestions about how parents can support their children's learning.)

Of the 11 locations summarized below, nine use standards-based report cards in the elementary grades only. Aurora Public Schools issues standards-based report cards for students in grades K-12. Milwaukee Public Schools issues standards-based report cards for students in grades K-8.

1. Albuquerque Public Schools
<http://www.aps.edu/parents/student-and-family-guides>
2. Aurora Public Schools - Colorado
<http://instruction.aurorak12.org/sbg/>
3. Baltimore County Public Schools
http://www.bcps.org/parents/ReportCard/Parent_Guide_English_and_Translations/parent_Guide_for_the_Elementary_Report_Card_ENGLISH.pdf
4. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
<http://schools.cms.k12.nc.us/oldeprovidenceES/Pages/NewK-2ReportCards.aspx>
5. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
<http://www.mnps.org/Page57500.aspx>
6. Milwaukee Public Schools
http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/portal/server.pt/comm/parents/334/standards-based_report_card_pilot/43722
7. Portland Public Schools
http://www.pps.k12.or.us/news-c/reportcards_ga.php
8. San Diego Unified School District
<http://old.sandi.net/sbrc>
9. San Francisco Unified School District
http://web.sfusd.edu/services/research_public/lists/sbrc_menu/AllItems.aspx
10. Wake County Public School System
<http://www.wcpss.net/what-we-teach/curriculum/elem-report-card.html>
11. Hawaii Department of Education
http://reportcard.k12.hi.us/teachers_admin/files/KTeacherGuidelinesSY11-12.pdf

Summary

This Information Capsule summarized the advantages and disadvantages of standards-based grading systems. Advocates of standards-based grading systems claim that they provide detailed information to both students and parents about students' learning, allow teachers to adjust instruction more effectively, result in more accurate and consistent assignment of grades, remove competition for high grades from the classroom, and can be part of an effort to close the achievement gap. Those who oppose standards-based grading systems argue that they confuse parents, increase teacher workloads, reduce student motivation, and require teachers to participate in extensive professional development in order to master the new system.

Although supporters of standards-based grading systems maintain that they have a positive impact on student achievement, few studies have been conducted to verify this claim. More research is needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding what, if any, impact standards-based grading systems have on student achievement.

A review of practices used by U.S. school districts that facilitate the transition from traditional grading systems to standards-based grading systems was provided in this report. Best practices include involving all stakeholders when planning for the new grading system, identifying the specific standards for which students will be held accountable (power standards), reporting non-achievement factors (such as absences, attitude, and effort) separately, emphasizing students' most recent test scores, eliminating failing grades for late or incomplete assignments, and providing teachers with extensive professional development.

A listing of 10 U.S. school districts and one state that are using standards-based report cards was also provided. A website where detailed information and sample standards-based report cards can be obtained was included for each location.

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