

## CFISD Standards-Based Grading Questions & Answers January 2011

### **Q: What is Standards-Based Grading (SBG)?**

**A:** Standards-Based Grading (SBG ) is a refined way of reporting what students know and how they demonstrate their learning of state content standards. It does not report by assignment, test or quiz, but instead the grade is divided by the concept (standard) that is being assessed in the assignment, test, or quiz. For example, if a test covered 2 concepts, then 2 different grades would be recorded in the gradebook, one for each concept (standard) tested. The cumulative grade for each content standard is based upon the achievement level during the grading period. Students are to be assessed on the content standards in a variety of ways (verbal, written, standardized, hands-on, activity-based, etc.) and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their level of mastery. This allows for a holistic appraisal of the level of learning and application. This total assessment picture will reflect what the student does at home to prepare, what the student can do in class, and how the student can explain their learning.

### **Q: What is the purpose of Standards-Based Grading (SBG)?**

**A:** The purpose of Standards-Based Grading is to align what kids do and the grades they receive with the state content standards as measured by consistent and accurate student achievement data and common criteria for grading. It is designed to take the discretionary point “weighting” system away from how we assign points to questions on assignments that measure multiple concepts and learning goals and measure ONE thing based upon a standard mastery rubric. When the measurement tool is uniform, the product doesn’t have to be. Teachers are very skilled at being able to assess levels of understanding based upon what a student says, does, and submits.

### **Q: What is the goal of Standards-Based Grading (SBG)?**

**A:** The primary goal of SBG is to better communicate to students, parents, teachers and administrators what each student knows and is able to do according to state content standards and separately assess the influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning.

### **Q: How does SBG work?**

**A:** Traditional grading averages all of the work and other subjective factors that a student has encountered over a grading period. SBG removes extraneous factors and solely focuses on proficiency. Standards-Based Grading assesses a student’s overall work, using the most recent preponderance of evidence. What this really tells us is what a student has learned, rather than an average of what they knew walking into class each day.

### **Q: Does SBG benefit one “type” of student?**

**A:** This model has something to offer for all types of students. It benefits the student who learns something quickly and swiftly and allows him to achieve higher levels on new concepts without completing work on skills already mastered, and also the average student who has typically done well on some parts of a unit, but not others. It also benefits the struggling student by allowing the student/parent/teacher to see specifically which learning goal is difficult for the student to achieve. It is no longer about the assignment, but now about the learning. When a student stays after for tutorials and the teacher asks, “What don’t you understand?” The student in the traditional model that didn’t do well on a quiz or a test might say, “Everything” or “I don’t

know.” In the SBG model, the student can easily say, “I’m still too low in standard 1” or “I want to get better in standard 2.” It easily shows the student/teacher/parent which concepts are causing trouble and allows us to look for patterns, trends, possible misconceptions, etc. Students can focus where they need to focus.

**Q: Why don’t they average grades in SBG?**

**A:** Students are to be assessed on the content standards in a variety of ways (verbal, written, standardized, hands-on, activity-based, etc.) and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their level of mastery. This allows for a holistic appraisal of the level of learning and application. This total assessment picture will reflect what the student does at home to prepare, what the student can do in class, and how the student can explain their learning. An averaged grade doesn’t give you an authentic representation of the final level of understanding, but instead a number that represents an average of the work that was done each day of the grading period.

**Q: How is it fair that students are allowed to turn in different assignments?**

**A:** Some assessments will always be standardized for alignment purposes, of course. Although, at times in a SBG model students may "defend" how well they know and understand a concept by self-selecting how they demonstrate mastery. One student may do a written paper, one a presentation, one a video diary, one recreate a CNN debate, etc. The teacher assesses how well the student demonstrated understanding. With the quantity of tools and resources for learning in our world today, students are afforded more choices in how they demonstrate their learning based upon their resources, preferences, and skills. Not every student’s level of learning can be equitably measured with the same tool.

**Q: Why do we need this change?**

**A:** According to the CFISD 2010 District Action Plan, within the Achievement goals, we will provide the most rigorous environment for students to achieve the highest level of achievement to be college and career ready at ALL levels of accomplishment. SBG benefits ALL levels of achievement. As we continue to work to meet the needs of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century students, we are working to meet the following 21<sup>st</sup> Century Standards:

[http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=351&Itemid=120](http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=351&Itemid=120)

- Focuses on 21st century skills, content knowledge and expertise
- Builds understanding across and among core subjects as well as 21st century interdisciplinary themes
- Emphasizes deep understanding rather than shallow knowledge
- Engages students with the real world data, tools, and experts they will encounter in college, on the job, and in life--students learn best when actively engaged in solving meaningful problems
- Allows for multiple measures of mastery

**Q: What will happen to students who transfer to other districts who don’t use a Standards Based Grading system? How will their GPA be factored?**

**A:** The way that we calculate grade point averages will not change. SBG only affects how students demonstrate learning and how teachers measure learning, but the reporting of grades on the

transcript will remain the same. SBG will not affect students who transfer to other districts or students who apply for college.

**Q: How does this differ from traditional letter grades?**

**A:** Standards-based grading reports tell us what students have actually learned and know. Standards-based grading measures students' knowledge of grade-level content over time by reporting the most recent, consistent level of performance. So, a student might struggle in the beginning of a grading period with new content, but then learn and demonstrate proficient performance by the end of the grading period.

For example: In traditional grading, the student's performance for the whole grading period would be averaged and early quiz scores that were low would be averaged together with proficient performance later in the course resulting in a lower grade. In standards based grading, a student who reaches proficiency would be reported proficient and the grade would reflect current performance level.

In addition, traditional grading often includes other subjective factors like attendance, effort, and attitude, which might influence the grade positively or negatively. In standards based grading, we will report proficiency and work habits separately in order to give a more accurate report of student progress.

The new Standards-Based grading system will provide two different reports: One will tell us what students know compared to the standards and the other will assess the more behavioral factors like participation and effort. Number and letter grades will be used for academic achievement. Work habits/skills will be communicated on the PIV but will not be reported on the students' report card or transcript.

**Q: Who has been involved in the process?**

**A:** At this point, district personnel have been focused on research and development in order to:

- Research a secondary standards-based reporting system to align grading and standards as measured by consistent and accurate student achievement data and common criteria for grading.
- Lead and support the continuous and systematic alignment with the entire leadership of District Directors of Instruction and Secondary Content Coordinators.
- Ensure the alignment on the end result with the CFISD Mission and goals.
- Make final recommendations to the superintendent.

Campus personnel have been prioritizing benchmarks within the content standards of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. These teams are determining evidence that students have met the standards. An additional team of teachers are determining specific work habits, performance indicators, and a grading rubric to separately report out on the work habits of students.

**Q: What does it mean when you say "Langham is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century" campus?**

**A:** Recently, we had Dr. Anthony, our Assoc. Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction and

Secondary Administration, the Assoc. Superintendent for Technological Systems, and about 15 other district office visitors, plus several other campus administrators visiting because we were named by the district as a 21st Century Showcase Campus. One of the visitors took pictures of students during 2nd and 3rd period and I've attached the link to the slideshow. As I look at the pictures of kids learning on our campus, I think about the many different ways we have for kids to learn and to demonstrate learning in this century. There are so many more tools and resources for them to reach so many more goals than were ever available from a textbook, an overhead, a scantron test, a double-spaced typed report or a posterboard project, typical of the 20th century classroom. Clips from this video were shown to the Principals/DIs and leaders for about 50 schools in our district later that week at a CFISD General Leadership meeting. Look at our video if you get a chance.

<http://animoto.com/play/AooOrAiTKYHHVKoCPRTyxg>

We have embraced technology applications, web resources, portable digital devices, and tools in the classroom that open new doors to learning and demonstrating mastery to make it more meaningful and enduring for students. This SBG allows for more of these tools to be used by students to learn and demonstrate learning within the parameters of their world.

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habits/skills will be communicated on the PIV but will not be reported on the students' report card or transcript.

**Q: When will this go into effect?**

**A:** Implementing SBG is currently a pilot program only in seven content areas starting in the 4<sup>th</sup> six weeks. Other than the Vanguard Group (English II, Algebra I, Chemistry, Biology AP, Anatomy & Physiology, World Geography), we do not have definitive data for additional groups for next fall at this time. We have information that other schools in our district will be adopting a school-wide model for 2010-11, but we do not anticipate that at this time.

**Q: Why was Langham Creek chosen to be the pilot for this program?**

**A:** Langham Creek HS has been looking at 'Assessment for Learning' and differentiated assessment paradigms for two years now. We have also been focusing on bringing 21st century skills and tools into the classroom to enhance learning because our campus is aligned with the 21st Century philosophy of learning and grading. There are already pockets of SBG at the middle and high school level and specifically, we visited a physics team that is successfully implementing SBG at a sister CFISD school with impressive results. Currently, there is another district high school with a similar Vanguard (pilot) group. Specifically for Langham Creek HS, many of our teachers already support a standards-based model paradigm and have been mentally converting from a traditional classroom grading model, which is why it seems to be a good fit for us.

**Q: Do you have any information and/or documented statistics available that further explains this holistic approach?**

**A:** Dr. Robert Marzano is a leading educator whose research has been a model for this district for over 10 years. "Marzano's Strategies" from the book, Classroom Instruction that Works, are the expectation for nearly every classroom in this district. Dr. Marzano recently published another book, Classroom Strategies that Work: Formative Assessment & Standards-Based Grading, which does offer documented statistics from his research. Other work by Ken O'Connor, Jay McTighe (Understanding by Design), and Rick Wormeli is upon who we based our program. We have also been following various school districts from other states who have already fully implemented SBG.

**Q: Why are you beginning this change mid-year?**

**A:** There is a likelihood that we may be moving to a standards-based model in the near or distant future as possibly a school, a district, or a state. We want to be at the forefront of this movement and have relevant data to be in a position to make research-based, data-driven decisions when faced with a school-wide or district-wide decision. Our Vanguard teams participating in the pilot chose to participate based upon readiness and their desire to meet the changing needs of their learners.

**Q: What do you mean by 'standards' in a unit? Are these standards different each unit?**

**A:** Standards are the learning goals for the unit and are based upon the state standards for learning. These standards are aligned with the TEKS and will be uniform across the classes by level. The standards will be dependent upon the unit and the course.

**Q: How can kids be successful without doing homework? Doesn't this just help the "lazy" kids?**

**A:** Although homework is not always "graded" in the model, it is expected preparation for class. The teacher might assess the kids doing work on white boards based upon last night's homework problems and kids that are not prepared will not fare as those who are. But, if your child feels prepared after 15 math problems, then there is no reason he should need to do all 30 math problems when he still has science or an AP class to prepare for.

Let's say a "lazy" student decided not to prepare for math one day. He now has more "homework" to do to prepare for tomorrow, but also has to catch-up from yesterday if he wants to do better. Because content builds, it's not about "re-taking" assignments or quizzes really, it's about having to do another assignment to now show the teacher that you know the content better...MORE WORK. Kids with poor work habits are less likely to take that initiative, and it won't take long for shortcut takers to learn a quick lesson in "haste makes waste." The work skills that enabled students to be successful in the traditional grading system are the same work skills that will enable students to be successful in this system. Many students will learn quickly that there is "no place to hide" academically in the SBG system. It should become very apparent very quickly who is learning, and to what level, and who is not.

**Q: If you take away the "homework" and/or daily grades, how many assessments will be given within a 6 week grading period?**

**A:** Every day is an assessment in the SBG model. Teachers may take organized activities, papers or projects as grades, but there is more opportunity to assess student learning. In other words, the class may have a class activity one day, a discussion one day, classwork, homework quizzes, teacher-student questioning, class participation, warm-ups, a planned standards quiz, and the students may have a standardized test that covers 2-3 standards at the end of a unit. There should be ample opportunity to demonstrate learning.

**Q: Should we, CFISD, be considering a 9 week (quarterly) grading period for secondary levels in order to allow for more assessment scores in order to give enough opportunity for the student to succeed in a grading period?**

**A:** That is something that has been brought up at district meetings, but evidently there are some UIL reporting details that are complicating to the calendar of a 9 week grading period. No changes are anticipated at this time for next year.

**Q: Are there any other grading changes we don't know about?**

**A:** The district is moving to a new digital gradebook that better aligns with our master scheduling program and our grade reporting system/PIV. This new system will align all of our digital systems in the district and allow them to communicate better. The gradebook will have new functionality for teachers and although we do not have direct access to it yet, we do know it has the capacity to have direct links to state standards.

**Q: Let us say that my student receives the following grades for a single standard: 0, 1, 3, 3, 4, 2, 4- Does this mean s/he will earn a 4- since it is the LAST grade?**

**A:** SBG does not necessarily report the single, final grade, but follows the preponderance of grades or trend line. The goal is to report the final level of mastery and the teacher will need to consult

with this student to confirm the inconsistencies in reporting. Students are active participants in navigating their learning, so they might need to defend these scores.

**Q: I've heard someone talk about a "trend line". What is this? What does it mean to my student?**

**A:** The trend line is a statistical tool that indicates a general pattern. This is used to determine the final grade for a standard.

**Q: What are the "standards"?**

**A:** The standards are based on each course's "state standards for what students should know and be able to do" from TEA's website explaining Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

**Q: With what grade does a student have the opportunity to retake a test? Or is it at the student's discretion if they want to improve a test score?**

**A:** There will still be team/teacher discretion as to whether or not there will be redo/retesting for the cumulative tests, projects, etc. The good news about SBG is that because grades are not weighted, there should be many opportunities to show mastery and a student should have had multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of a concept or standard. If a student feels that a grade does not represent an accurate level of understanding, that student has an opportunity to do additional work to defend a higher grade. Since it is not a point assigned system, a student doesn't "earn" points, but instead a student earns credit for learning.

**Q: Why are there no zeroes?**

**A:** In the SBG system students earn credit for demonstrated learning. If a student submits no work or demonstrates no learning, then no credit is assigned. There are zeroes in the gradebook, but they represent "no data" or "no progress." If no learning is demonstrated on even one standard, then a student is not eligible to pass the class.

**Q: How many redo opportunities does a student have on a missing assignment or low grade?**

**A:** This model is designed to incorporate work skills into the learning model and prepare kids to learn the habits needed to be successful in college and in jobs in the future. If a student wasn't prepared for math one day, he now has more work to do to prepare for tomorrow, but also has to still catch-up from yesterday if he wants to do better. Because content builds, it's not about always "re-taking" assignments or quizzes really, it's about having to do another assignment to now show the teacher that you know the content better...MORE WORK. Kids with poor work habits are less likely to take that initiative, and it won't take long for shortcut takers to learn a quick lesson in haste makes waste.

**Q: What is the effect on the GPA?**

**A:** SBG will have no effect on GPA. It will continue to allow students the opportunity to gain the quality education that is rich and meaningful and allow them to understand their natural academic strengths and really nurture those gifts where they can master skills quickly and then go above and beyond. Students will still be gaining the work habits that will enable them to move to the next level and be just as successful as the bar is raised even higher. In the traditional system, students

complete the assignment, receive an A (or B, etc.) and is done. In this system, if they do something and master it to an A level early, they can go deeper in to the content or move on to the next standard working ahead. Some students might appreciate the opportunity to show mastery and then move ahead instead of having to complete additional problems/assignments on the "easy" stuff. If they struggle on a concept and don't catch on quite as quickly, they can focus on that concept and know exactly what is needed to move to the next highest grade level.

**Q: We have been working with a 7.0 GPA, is this affected?**

**A:** The SBG ties seamlessly with our current GPA system. Both 0-4 and the numeric grades are reported in the digital gradebook (PIV) system. Only the numeric grade is reported on the transcript.

**Q: What are the prerequisites for a student to exempt a final?**

**A:** There are no changes in the prerequisites to exempt finals.

(From Student Handbook 2010-2011: Pg HB-13)

*"A student shall be exempt from an examination when he or she has a grade of A (90-100) or B (80-89) and has no more than three absences from that course in the semester."*

This too will have no changes. Within the SBG, the designation of A or B would be a 3- or better.

*"All students in grades 9 – 11 shall have the opportunity to earn additional exemptions from spring semester exams. Students earning a passing score on any grade-level TAKS test may earn an exemption from the spring exam in that subject/course...These exemptions shall be based on the subject –area TAKS test, grades for both semesters, and attendance for the spring semester. A student shall be exempt from an examination when he or she has a grade of 70 or higher for each semester of the course and no more than three absences from that course in the spring semester."*

**Q: What if my student is with a teacher who uses the current grading system and then receives a schedule change to a teacher who uses the new SBG?**

**A:** With few exceptions, moving to the SBG system was a team decision; therefore, for students maintaining the same level class this scenario should not occur. We will address this on an individual basis as needed.

**Q: Will there be a parent meeting?**

**A:** We do not have anything scheduled at this time. We are currently looking at our best and most efficient and effective format for communicating to both students and parents.

**If you have additional questions, first check the website where we will continually be updating the 'Questions & Answers' document. Next, talk to your child's SBG teacher. If you still have questions, please call our Director of Instruction @ (281)345-3589.**