



# STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What is standards-based teaching, learning, & grading?**

Standards-based education is outcome-based, meaning that instructional efforts are focused on clearly defined measurable, observable outcomes or goals. “School is no longer about the completion of a series of activities, but rather the pursuit of proficiency as a set of outcomes that students achieve through the instructional experience” (Schimmer 8). The use of standards is more rigorous, consistent, and transparent. “The simple idea of standards-based learning is to ensure transparency in all elements of the teaching learning process: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting” (DeWitt).

## **What does a standards-based classroom look like?**

At first glance, a standards-based classroom will look like any other classroom. The differences are subtle. Typically, the focus of the day, the standard or the “I Can” is displayed on a whiteboard or a poster. The teacher and the students will refer often to a proficiency scale built around the current learning objective to either informally assess where each student is at or to clarify next steps. While the teacher does engage in direct instruction, more often a standards-based classroom is immersed in learning strategies that help students engage in critical thinking and are self-directed opportunities for learning. A standards-based classroom collects formative assessments, quick peeks into learning that guide both the teacher and the student. The focus is what the student knows and is able to do, and there are multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning.

## **Why change from the traditional grading practices that have been used for years?**

Interestingly enough, there is no meaningful research to support traditional grading practices (Marzano 2000). Because “most teachers have not received adequate training in reliable and valid assessment methods,” they revert to grading the way their teachers graded, resulting in huge disparity among teachers (Reeves 2004). Thus, grades are influenced by teaching style and preference, not by data-driven decision making (Cox 2011; Guskey & Bailey 2001, Zoeckler 2007 as cited in Townsley 2016). Standards-based grading is about measuring what students know and are able to do in relation to well-defined learning objectives and reporting where students are in regard to proficiency on those objectives (Tomlinson & McTighe 2006). Standards-based grading gives teachers, parents, and students an accurate and specific account of what the students know.



## **What about the report card?**

In its purist form, standards-based grading avoids assigning point systems and grades or letters. All reporting is about measuring proficiency. A standards-based report card will list the standards attempted in the grading period and the level of proficiency. The Oregon Conference has spent a great deal of time researching Student Information Systems that will best fit our needs during this time of transition from traditional to standards-based and has settled on School Insight, which allows both and is able to report out a traditional overall letter grade to meet current college and scholarship requirements.

## **Is standards-based learning just another initiative?**

A lot of prayer and thought goes into decisions about conference initiatives and a large part of that is how a new initiative builds on and interacts with other learnings. There is a multitude of research that supports teaching and grading with standards as a way to focus learning by challenging “students to think deeper and work towards more meaningful applications” (Townsend & Buckmiller, Ph.D. 2016). That is what Adventist education is about. Ellen White says it best: “Every human being, created in the image of God is endowed with a power akin to that of the creator—individuality, power to think and to do... It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train young people to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other people’s thoughts.” The North American Division Office of Education has committed to training and supporting teachers, conferences, and unions in standards-based learning.

## **How do all of the Oregon Conference initiatives tie together?**

The Oregon Conference is pursuing three main aspirations: Christ-Centered Culture, Restorative Relationships with Positive Choices, and Maximizing Individual Potential. Each student is of infinite value as an exclusively created child of God with strengths to be developed for their designed purpose. All initiatives tie in to these pursuits. Standards-based teaching and learning provides the framework or structure to guide the focus for “voice and choice” in their academic lives and where the teacher focuses the learning on the student’s strengths, needs, and interests (Payne 2020). Some of the other conference initiatives such as PBL and STEM are “essential drivers in making education more personal for students through relevant and meaningful learning experiences” (Siler & Quick).

## **How do students and parents respond to standards-based grading?**

Because standards-based grading is so different from the traditional method, “it takes time, discussion, and reflection for students to understand their rights and responsibilities in such a system” (Scriffiny 2008). Most parents and students are pleased with the opportunities for revision and reassessment and appreciate that a standards focus allows students to take control of their learning. Parents appreciate being able to see progress on what their child is actually learning.

## Works Cited

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