

Learning Leadership

Strengthening the Capacity of 21st Century Leaders and Learners

Standards-Based Elementary Report Cards: Central Themes and Considerations for School Leaders and Staff Developers

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Many districts in New York State and across the nation are moving to standards-based report cards in order to better communicate learning successes and needs. As the standards-based education movement progresses, districts are seeing the creation of standards-based reports as a means to consolidate their initiatives and communicate student learning clearly to students, parents, and caregivers. Education leaders such as Reeves (2000), Marzano and Heftewower (2011), Guskey and Bailey (2010), and others contend that standards-based grading can have a marked impact on improving student learning as learning targets and achievement are better documented.

~ Those leaders who have the courage to challenge the traditional grading approach and the conviction to press for thoughtful, positive reforms are likely to see remarkable results. ~
Thomas R. Guskey

Setting the Stage for Success

Making sure that teachers and administrators have grounding in the current literature centered on standards-based grading is essential. Some of the pivotal authors in this area are Guskey (2002), Guskey and Bailey (2010), Marzano (2006), Marzano and Heftewower (2011), and Vatterott (2015). Reviewing standards-based report cards and supporting materials (rubrics, parent guides, etc.) created by pioneering districts helps teams conceptualize central issues and language. Participants in the change process need to understand that one of the central concepts in standards-based report cards is that they “help parents relate standards to their children” (Guskey and Jung, 2006, p. 1).

Mindful Movement

Deep-seated beliefs about “scoring” and “grading” are difficult to change, therefore it is important to make the process more manageable. Trying to change scoring and grading practices while also changing the items that are graded makes movement to standards-based report cards very challenging. Therefore, separate the two key initial tasks: 1) agreeing on a grading scale and 2) agreeing on what to grade. Then provide support on grading/scoring practices after these key decisions are made. The conceptualization of the standards-based grading scale is often the most controversial.

It is critical to view grading scales from educator, student, and parental points of view. Considering a range of possible scales to be chosen from and how different stakeholders would view them is a critical aspect of transitioning to a standards-based report card. Models to consider:

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| <p>M - Meeting the Standards P - Progressing to Meet the Standards N - Not Progressing to Meet the Standards</p> | <p>M - Meeting the Grade Level Standards N - Not Currently Meeting the Grade Level Standards</p> | <p>4 - Exceeding Grade Level Standards 3 - Meeting Grade Level Standards 2 - Progressing to Grade Level Standards 1 - Not Progressing toward Grade Level Standards</p> |
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Another strategy for moving the project forward that breeds consensus is looking at samples from other districts and then conducting a careful review of the current report card in use. During each level of review, use a different strategy to keep things fresh and focused. When reviewing outside examples, have each teacher review a packet of samples and then ask them to highlight using red as “don’t like”, yellow as “pondering”, and green as “like” and then have grade level teams join together for a document-based conversation centered on the color coding. Each grade level can present what they liked and were pondering, without comment from other grade levels. This creates a multi level understanding of a starting-point for reform.

A district might well consider that a 4-3-2-1 scale that aligns with the 3-8 NYSED grading scale may not be a strategic choice when teachers are learning standards-based grading, as it could wind up with state assessment scores that do not align to report card grades. Therefore, there may be some advantage to using scores such as “M” for meeting the standards and “N” for not yet meeting the standards rather than assigning a number.

Sample Action Timeline

- Form representative committee
- Evaluate current report cards
- Evaluate other districts’ standards-based reports cards
- Study Session on NYSED learning standards
- Mock-up session by grade level of new standards-based report cards
- Check that there is a vertical progression within the standards that flows from grade to grade within the mock-up proposed report cards
- Generate final draft report cards for review
- Generate grade-level rubric that aligns with the report cards
- Create parent guides that align with the report cards and rubric
- Use the new materials and provide instructional coaching on standards-based grading for teachers

For more information or professional development on standards-based report cards please contact your local BOCES or Big Cities representative.

Key Take Aways

There are a number of key concepts that will enhance success. Assure that your initiative to move to standards-based report cards is aligned with researched-based practices in assessment and professional development. It is helpful to have one administrator or staff developer guide the process from start to end. Make sure that all involved in the initiative remember that the report card serves as means to communicate to families how learning is progressing, and other instructional documents track progress for teachers. Support teachers to listen and reflect on assessment and communication practices throughout the process. Provide documentation of decisions made and what is yet to do as the process moves forward. Reference national and regional authors and provide examples from pioneer districts.

Districts with Standards-based Report Cards or Support Materials Posted on their Websites: Some Samples for Consideration

Hicksville Public Schools

<http://www.hicksvillepublicschools.org/Page/8687>

Livonia Central School District

<http://www.livoniacsd.org/Schools/ElementarySchool/standardsbasedreportcard/>

Oswego City Schools

<http://www.oswego.org/files/81/Reportcard%20Handbook.pdf>

Wayland-Cohocton Central School District

<http://www.wccsk12.org/waylandelementary>

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