The QCSD Standards-based Grading Playbook!

Purpose of Standards-based Grading:

Quakertown Community School District's purpose of standards-based grading is to raise student achievement by clearly communicating students' progress toward learning targets.

What is Standards-based Grading?

Standards-based grading is a reporting system used to increase student achievement. It consists of:

- A focus on students mastering defined learning targets instead of accumulating points
- A report that tracks student achievement toward meeting learning targets at a given time
- A collection of mounting evidence based on assessments
- A record keeping system that informs instruction
- A system that encourages student reflection and responsibility for learning

Grading Practices
(Please see "Clarification of Required Grading Practices" for more specific instructions!)

- Students should be able to state which learning targets are being addressed by each assessment.
- Grades correlate to achievement of defined learning targets.
- It is mandatory that students are assessed on every learning target in the QCSD gradebook for each course.
- Students should be able to track their progress on each learning target at all times.
- Grades are based on individual, not group achievement.
- Checking for understanding should be used to inform instruction and remediation efforts. Assessment should be an ongoing process.
- Feedback includes written and oral comments intended to coach students on how to improve learning and achievement.
- Multiple opportunities are provided for demonstrating understanding through revision, alternative and/or subsequent assignments after receiving appropriate correctives. Students may need to meet defined conditions set by the teacher prior to being given additional opportunities to show understanding.

- All students have the opportunity to be reassessed, regardless of the current learning target performance level. Students may need to meet defined conditions set by the teacher prior to being given additional opportunities to show understanding. These requirements may include:
  - Completion of the original task or assessment
  - Completion of required assignments
  - Completion of the reteaching/relearning activities
- There is no penalty to a student for requiring additional time and instruction to learn. However, teachers may choose to define end points for both in order to accommodate grade and reporting periods.
- Achievement is reported separately from employability.
- All students have the opportunity to perform strategic thinking on a learning target, even if it requires remediation.
- Work that is turned in late will be assessed for achievement. Any penalty for a student's lack of preparation/timeliness may be reflected in an employability grade.
- If a student's progress toward a learning target is inconsistent or unclear, the teacher should collect more evidence in one of the following ways:
  - Develop different opportunities for the student to demonstrate understanding after providing correctives if necessary;
  - Discuss the assessment items to see why the student answered incorrectly;
  - Interview students using scaffolding questions to determine level of understanding.

Getting Started

- Become familiar with QCSD established Big Ideas and Learning Targets.
- Share these learning targets with parents and students.
- Clearly define performance indicators of proficiency.

Designing Assessments

Quakertown Community School District is committed to developing students who can think critically and creatively in order to enhance the skills they will need for the 21st Century. We are accomplishing this by providing clear and common learning targets along with activities that require a high level of cognitive demand (Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge).

There are four levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK); but to ensure clarity and consistency, we refer to them by label or by letter (see below).

Levels of Cognitive Demand:

- Recall (R)
- Basic application of concept/skills (B)
- Strategic thinking (S)
- Extended thinking (E)

Activities are created with the purpose of incorporating different levels of questions. Number correct out of possible correct items is not taken into consideration. Students exhibit in-depth understanding through exemplary performance on the basic application, strategic thinking and extended thinking activities.

Levels of Cognitive Demand	Definition
Recall	Recall of information such as a fact, definition, term or performance of a simple process or procedure.
Basic application of skill/concept	Use of information, conceptual knowledge and procedures. Includes the engagement of some mental processing beyond recall and reproduction. Students have to make some decisions as to how to approach the question/problem. Actions imply more than one mental or cognitive process/step.
Strategic thinking	Requires reasoning, developing a plan or sequence of steps; has some complexity. It is often open-ended, but not always.
Extended thinking	Requires an investigation; time to think and process; multiple conditions of the problem or task.

Designing Assessments

For each learning target, provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate basic application and strategic or extended thinking. Pay close attention to the level of cognitive demand as defined by the learning target. For example, some learning targets require recall of facts and procedures only, while others require higher levels of thinking such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Refer to the work of Benjamin Bloom, Norman Webb and Robert Marzano for further information.

Once you have developed the standards aligned assessment, you will use your assessment to guide instruction and differentiate for diverse learners. Assessment types include, but are not limited to:
- Tests and quizzes

- Performance tasks -- mainly products, performances, and projects (e.g., essays, artwork, visual representations, models, multimedia, oral presentations, lab experiences, live or recorded performances, demonstrations)
- Oral/written responses
- Tickets Out the Door
- End of Year Benchmark Assessment

Scoring Possibilities for Activities/Assessments:

Recall	Basic Applicaiton of Concept/Skill	Strategic Thinking	Extended Thinking
Possible Scores 1, 2, 3	Possible Scores 1, 2, 3,4	Possible Scores 1, 2, 3,4	Possible Scores 1, 2, 3,4

REMEMBER:

- Activities are often designed to assess more than one learning target.
- Each learning target on an assessment should be scored individually.
- All students must be given opportunities to show their understanding through activities that require strategic or extended thinking.
- Instruction should include ways to effectively process information critically.

Record Keeping for Learning Target Proficiency

- Your records should directly reflect the level of student achievement toward each learning target in all subjects. It should only reflect academic progress. In your gradebook for evidence, you may choose to use a numerical (1, 2, 3, 4), a descriptive scale (adv, pro, bas, bel bas) or other format of your choice.
- If an assessment encompasses several learning targets, it is not appropriate to average in a manner consistent with a total points system. Record the score for each learning target separately in your gradebook.

Student Version of Scoring Rubric of Learning Targets on an Activity

4.0	I know (can do) it well when making connections, explaining my thinking, applying the learning target to new situations.
3.0	I know (can do) everything that was taught and apply it accurately.
2.0	I know (can do) all the easy parts, but I don't know (can't do) the harder parts.
1.0	With help, I know (can do) some of what was taught.
0.0	I don't know (can't do) any of it.

Determining Overall Score for Learning Targets

- As a general rule, you should have multiple pieces of evidence at appropriate levels of cognitive demand for each learning target.
- Remember, when determining student's overall level of proficiency of learning targets:
  - Review mounting evidence.
  - Give priority to the most recent evidence.
  - Give priority to the most comprehensive evidence.
  - Give priority to the evidence from strategic or extended thinking activities.
  - Numerical scores should NOT be averaged in the manner consistent with a total points system.
- After collecting evidence, when determining a student's overall score for each learning target, you must use the 1 through 4 proficiency rubric as defined below.

Proficiency Rubric for Determining Overall Score for Each Learning Target
(at the end of the marking period)

4
Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student exceeds learning target by performing at exemplary levels. Some examples of this include:
- Breaking content into its components
- Making connections
- Applying learning target to a new situation
- Offering alternative perspectives
- Employing other higher order thinking skills

3.5
Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student meets and sometimes exceeds learning target as exhibited in performances on basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities. A student who scores a 3.5 has sometimes shown exemplary performance on activities that require a high level of cognitive demand.

3 Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student meets the learning target as exhibited in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.
2.5 *Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student almost meets learning targets as exhibited in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.*
2 Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student is approaching an understanding of the learning target as exhibited in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.
1.5 *Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student is beginning to develop necessary skills to meet the learning targets as exhibited in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.*
1 Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student exhibits limited skills necessary to meet the learning targets as shown in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.
0.5 *Using the most recent, comprehensive evidence requiring high levels of cognitive demand, the student does not exhibit necessary skills to meet the learning targets as shown in performances on recall, basic application, strategic and extended thinking activities.*
0 **NE/No evidence** of learning towards the target was shown (A right click "M" represents a student who is missing key evidence towards a learning target. A number may still be entered alongside the "M")

Report Card

The purpose of the QCSD report card is to provide information to parents on their child's progress towards meeting QCSD/PA State Standards, while providing direction for future performance. The report card also includes a student's rating on learning/employability skills which are recorded separately from academic progress.

Grade Conversions for Report Cards

After assessing each learning target, you will need to convert your scores to a grade. Average the numerical scores for the learning targets to determine an overall rating for the course. The scoring scale below should be used to determine report card rating for the course.

It is the teacher's responsibility to override the "average" for the course if that calculation does not accurately reflect what the student knows and is able to do.

In order to convert your standards-based assessments to one letter grade, please use the chart below:

Report Card Grade Conversions

Final Average Range	Resulting Letter Grade
3.51- 4	A
3 -3.5	B
2.5-2.99	C
2.0-2.49	D
0-1.99	F
Not enough evidence to report a grade	NE
Medically excused	MEx

Weighting learning targets is not at the discretion of individual teachers. This decision is made at the district level in collaboration with teachers of the course or discipline.

Learning/Employability Skills

*In order to achieve honor roll or distinguished honor roll status, a student must receive a 3 or a 4 in all areas of employability.

Learning/Employability skills may include but are not limited to information from the following categories. This is an overall grade and does not require separate entries of grades from each category.

- Teamwork – work within the group to analyze a situation, establish priorities, and apply resources for solving problems
    - Actively participation
    - Be proactive in carrying out assignments
    - Respect and support differences within the team
    - Implement team decisions

- Leadership & Responsibility – exhibiting individual behaviors that support goals and objectives of the group
  - Demonstrate integrity/professionalism
  - Attend regularly
  - Meet deadlines
  - Follow assigned schedules
  - Keep work organized
  - Respect authority
  - Follow rules/guidelines
  - Perform to the best of ability
- Problem solving – identifying problems and potential causes while developing and implementing action plans for solutions
  - Work creatively
  - Reason effectively
  - Be proactively to prevent problems
  - Determine cause-effect relationships
  - Base decisions on data
- Communication – exchanging ideas and information in oral, written, or visual form
  - Share ideas clearly and concisely orally and in writing
  - Interact with others effectively and rationally
  - Read and interpret information in various forms
  - Maintain two-way communication
  - Give/accept constructive feedback
- Information Processing – finding and using information
  - Identify information required
  - Determine information sources
  - Synthesize and organize information
- Adaptability – exhibiting flexibility and receptivity to changes in technologies, processes, practices and work environments
  - Accept changes in team configuration
  - Identify and embrace opportunities brought on by change
  - Integrate skills and knowledge across the curriculum
  - Accept changes in schedules and procedures
  - Know own strengths and weaknesses

Assessment:

4 – Consistently
3 – Frequently
2 – Sometimes
1 – Rarely
0 – Never

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How does standards-based grading work?**
  In traditional grading, a teacher averages all of the work and other subjective factors that a student has done over a semester. SBG practices remove extraneous factors and focus solely on proficiency. In standards-based grading, a teacher assesses a student's overall work and continued mounting evidence that indicates a true assessment of the child's present attainment of the learning targets.

- **How is standards-based grading different from traditional grading?**
  In SBG, subject areas are sub-divided into big ideas related to standards and their respective learning targets that students need to learn or master. Each target is assessed. Scores from activities that are provided solely for practice should not be included in the true assessment of the learning target. The influence of positive and consistent work habits on student learning is reported separately from the academics.

- **What are some advantages of standards-based grading?**
  - The learning targets are clearly articulated to the students throughout instruction.
  - Parents, teachers, and students can see progress towards proficiency of learning targets and make informed decisions on the next steps of the learning process.

- **What are some of the challenges of implementing SBG?**
  - Change takes time as we build understanding for everyone involved.
  - We need to help all stakeholders understand the positive impact of SBG on student achievement, given that traditional grading practices, while inferior, are ingrained in our culture.

- **What is the role of work completed outside of school?**
  There are 3 different types of assignments:
  - Practice assignments that help students master the concept.
  - Preview assignments which prepare students for new learning
  - Evidence assignments: projects, creative writing, written response, etc.

  It is necessary for students to see the connection between practice/preview work and evidence of understanding course content. At times depending on the needs of the learner, practice is necessary for attaining mastery. At other times, it is not. If a student can exhibit mastery without completing practice/preview type assignments, there should be NO penalty to the student. This includes penalizing the student in the category labeled "Learning/Employability Skills." In other words, practice should only be assigned to students who need it.

  Evidence assignments are provided for students as an opportunity to integrate knowledge taught in class and to demonstrate extension and application of learning

target knowledge and skills. Failure to complete evidence assignments may negatively impact a learning target grade not as a punitive measure, but because a key piece of evidence needed to verify a certain level of understanding is missing.

In order to build student and parent understanding of the different assignments, QCSD has established the protocol of eliminating the term "homework" and referring to assignments as practice, preview or evidence of learning targets.

- **How does a standards-based report card improve teaching and learning?**
  Knowing where the students are in their progress toward meeting learning targets is crucial for planning and carrying out classroom instruction. Teachers teach to the needs of their students. SBG is designed to give teachers more information about the student's progress in meeting the level of proficiency required by each learning target.

- **How does a teacher respond to the following parent question: "How does the new report card help improve my understanding of my child's learning?"**
  Parents will see the learning targets addressed each grading period and their child's progress in achieving those learning targets. Because the learning targets are clearly articulated for each course and public to all, and the learning targets are consistent within each course, more information can be determined from the assessment of learning targets than in a traditional system with test averages and letter grades. Based on assessments directly related to the learning targets throughout the grading period, teachers, parents and students are made aware of progress toward the learning targets and can work together to enhance achievement. Standards are an effective way of communicating curriculum expectations. Doug Reeves (*101 Questions and Answers about Standards, Assessment, and Accountability,* 2004) makes this point in the following quote:

  > *"By comparing one child's performance to a clear standard, parents, children and teachers all know precisely what is expected. Every time a student attempts a task, the performance is compared to the standard, not to other children's performances. The most important advantages for children and families are fairness, clarity, and improved learning."*

- **How will students' growth be reported?**
  In a standards-based report card, progress towards learning targets is documented during each grading period in the gradebook. On the report card, the academic achievement for each course will be converted to a letter grade, using an established scoring rubric (see Grade Conversion section). Learning/employability skills are reported separately each quarter for each course.

- **Why does SBG use most recent assessments vs. averaging?**
  Every student starts a grading period with a certain amount of background knowledge, some accurate and some not, related to a topic/learning targets. Through assessments throughout the grading period, teachers are able to determine a student's readiness to

achieve as well as the level of achievement of the learning targets. Since the goal is to document each student's "true score" based on learning targets, averaging all scores dilutes the information, underestimates a student's true score, and corrupts the determination of whether or not the student has achieved the targets.

- **How do teachers give one grade when there are multiple standards per quarter?**
  Quarterly grades are determined by evaluating a body of evidence based on the learning targets taught that quarter.

- **Do we report out on the student's proficiency for the end of the year target, or is the grade based on proficiency for that time of year?** The PA academic standards are designed as "end of the year" targets. The report card grade is summative information about the level of proficiency of the learning targets that are taught each grading period.

- **How will standards-based grading affect transcripts for colleges?**
  Other than the fact that the grades on the transcripts will be derived from standards-based grading and assessment, there will be no change in the appearance of the transcript.

- **How does SBG prepare students for college?**
  The components of standards-based grading have the capacity to enhance achievement of learning targets and increase students' understanding of the specific skills, strategies, knowledge and processes to succeed through the use of well-articulated targets and assessments. Through student tracking of progress towards learning targets with the support of teachers, the students are able to take increased ownership of their learning.

- **Does SBG lead to grade inflation?**
  If a grade truly represents the level of mastery, the grades students have earned represent the level of their understanding of the course material. It should provide an accurate picture of the student's performance, neither inflated nor deflated. The protocol does not allow for extra credit or curving assessments which in the past has sometimes resulted in grade inflation.

- **Have schools that use standards-based grading experienced significant increases in achievement?**
  Research on standards-based grading overwhelmingly shows that students learn their subjects better and perform better in later education levels, such as college, when implemented with fidelity both for instruction and assessment. The works of people such as Popham, Reeves, Marzano, Pickering, McTighe, Wiggins, Stiggins, Guskey, Brookhart, O'Connor, and the *High Schools That Work Breaking Ranks* program are good sources of evidence.

- **If students are allowed to retest, why will they try the first time?**
  Prior to an additional chance for assessment, evidence of "correctives" should be indicated. Significant remediation on the part of the student with teacher support should occur between the first attempt and the re-assessment. The additional opportunities to

show evidence of achievement of learning targets should be presented in an alternative form, as a general rule. Most students learn quickly that it takes less work to do it right the first time.

● **At what level of specificity should students be evaluated?** (Standards, Eligible Content, Concept)
On May 19, 2009, all departments at all levels determined the level of specificity related to their specific PA academic standards for assessment purposes.

● **How will "incompletes" be handled in the high school?**
The grade of incomplete has been replaced with the grade "Needs More Evidence" (NE). NEs are used as a report card grade to indicate that a student is actively working on a learning target(s) beyond the close of a marking period and has a legitimate reason for the extended time frame. The suggested NE extension is approximately 2 weeks, but can be longer based on individual circumstances and the engagement of the student. The principal should be consulted and parents informed in extreme cases.

● **How do we fit standards-based grading into our current work?**
Standards-based grading is not an "add-on" but an assessment system inherent in the state standards-based system. The tenets of standards-based grading should replace any existing assessment practices that counteract students' achievement of standards. QCSD curriculum is aligned to PA standards, and each teacher's assessments need to be evaluated to determine their relationship to the standards.

● **How will professional development for standards-based grading be provided?**
Professional development for SBG is ongoing. It began almost 10 years ago when standards-based instruction was introduced to QCSD teachers. In addition, curriculum revisions in the past 10 years have reflected PA academic standards. A specific focus on standards-based grading was implemented many years ago at the elementary level and for the entire district in spring 2008. District-wide, we have participated in training on formative assessment, differentiated instruction and standards-based grading on multiple curriculum days. This training will continue through next year. In addition, Learning Facilitators have worked individually and in small groups with teachers to provide support through this process. Summer workshops and professional learning communities have been provided and will continue.

● **How will proficiency be reported for ELL students?**
PA State Requirements for Monitoring, Grading and Reporting Grades for ELL students:
- According to the April 2009 reviewed edition of the Basic Education Circular (PA Code 22 Pa. Code 4.26), students who are classified as ELL's (English Language Learners) must be graded using the same grading system as all other students, and their academic program must be delivered via curriculum aligned with Pennsylvania's Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking standards and the PA English Language Proficiency Standards.

- In order to meet the required state exit criteria for PA's English language instructional programs for ELLs, LEAs (Local Educational Agencies) must use both of the following as exit criteria:
  - Score of Basic (or higher) on PSSA
  - Scores of 5.0 on a Tier C ACCESS for ELLs assessment in each domain (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking).

  Additional exit criteria include final grades of C or better in core subject areas (math, language arts, science and social studies) and scores on district-wide assessments that are comparable to the BASIC performance level on PSSA (benchmarks). Therefore, accurate grading that provides LEAs with a true picture of ELL students' acquisition of standards is essential to make a determination of progress toward exiting the ELL program.

- Monitoring of ELLs' progress is required for two years after a student exits an ESL program and appropriate records of student progress must be maintained. Monitoring includes a periodic review of grades.

Accommodations in assessment procedures and reporting progress:
- **For Beginner/Emerging ELL's:** During the first 6-12 weeks, do not complete the QCSD report card as designed for all subject areas. ESL teachers should monitor and report on-going progress of the acquisition of English language levels and development of content-area understanding for each subject/course during that time as a narrative using the PA Language Proficiency Standards as a guide. The student's level of English proficiency, modifications to curriculum, and program accommodations provided should be indicated in the report narrative. The narrative should be composed collaboratively with the classroom teacher/content teachers. A signed and dated copy of the students' quarterly narratives should be placed in the cumulative folder. After the 6-12 week period, reporting of RELA progress should continue as a narrative as long as necessary (for Beginner/Emerging ELLs), but other subjects should be assessed and reported using the standards-based district designed protocol.

- **For all other ELL students**: ESL teachers should monitor and report on-going progress of the acquisition of English language levels and development of content-area understanding at each quarter through a narrative (including current level of English proficiency and accommodations provided); the content area teacher(s) should, in collaboration with the ESL teacher, report progress toward PA academic standards by using the established grade level, discipline and course Gradebook and report card. A signed and dated copy of the students' quarterly narratives and report cards should be placed in the cumulative folder.

🟡 **How will proficiency be reported for special education students?**
PA State Requirements:

- No Child Left Behind and IDEA (Chapter 14) (504 and Title 1) regulate assessment practices for students who are classified as child with a disability and/or in need of specially designed instruction; accommodations; and/or modifications to the curriculum must be graded using the same grading system as all other students and their academic program must be delivered via curriculum aligned with Pennsylvania's Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking standards and the PA Alternative Standards.
- Students assessed on the PSSA, as determined by the IEP team, will be assessed on the same Pennsylvania state standards as non-disabled peers.
- Students assessed on the PSSA-M versions of Reading, Writing, Math or Science will be assessed on the same Pennsylvania state standards as non-disabled peers.
- Students assessed on the PASA, as determined by the IEP team, will be assessed using the Pennsylvania Alternative Standards.

Accommodations in assessment procedures and reporting progress:
- The IEP team will determine what, if any accommodation(s) are needed for the student to meet the standards (e.g. books on tape, verbal testing, text to speech, etc.)
- The IEP Team will determine modifications to the curriculum (text available in a lower reading level, modified (abbreviated) assignments, a subset of the standards in the general curriculum, etc). Modifications to the curriculum for students who are not in replacement classes will be rare and will be initiated through the IEP process. Modifications will require collaboration between the content teacher and the special education teacher before the marking period begins in which reviewed data indicates the need for a learning target modification. Every effort should be made to collect evidence in multiple modalities and over reasonable time prior to recommendation of a modification. Modifications will need to be cleared through the Director of Curriculum for the content area and/or the Supervisor of Special Education.
- The IEP team will align each annual goal to the appropriate assessment standards and will establish progress monitoring procedures on the identified standards.
- The IEP team coordinator will provide each content teacher with a list of the specially designed instruction section, the goal section (which includes the progress monitoring probes) for each IEP.

Definitions:
- Adaptations that do not fundamentally change the grade level are called *accommodations.*
  Example: A high school learning disabled student is not able to provide written responses on tests and needs to be tested orally. He is held responsible for the same standards as every other student in the class.
- Adaptations that fundamentally do change the grade level are called *modifications.*

Example: A 4th grade student with a significant cognitive deficiency is included for Science and while the student may not be ready for the ecosystem, the IEP would write standards-based goals from a fundamentally related standard in sorting and classifying. This student would not be assessed on the same standards as the non-disabled peers and would be graded on the achievement alternative standard. (Jung & Guskey, April 2007)

● **How can parents become better informed about SBG?**
Ongoing updates have been placed on the website. Parents will be encouraged to ask individual teachers or building principals questions regarding grading practices at specific levels.

● **Is SBG more work for teachers?**
It may be a more efficient use of time in the future Rather than having to assign and grade a predetermined number of assignments, teachers will need to gather only the evidence required to demonstrate a student's level of proficiency. Teachers and students use information specific to learning targets to plan differentiated instruction based on student need. Students clearly understand the target, their needs, and the course of action to achieve the target. Once students are familiar with the system, they work with the teacher to reach for the proficient and/or advanced scores. This partnership makes teaching and assessing more efficient.

● **Will there be concerns about PIAA weekly eligibility?**
No. According to the PIAA State Board President, students who are making acceptable progress towards proficiency in the standards for a course would be considered to be passing the course. Teachers will continue to provide weekly status reports regarding students' eligibility.

Suggested reading
- Guskey (2007/08). The Rest of the Story. *Educational Leadership, 65(4), 28-35.*
- Kallick and Costa. *Habits of Mind*
- Marzano (2006). *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work*
- O'Connor (2002). *How to Grade for Learning*
- Scriffiny *(2008).* **Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading.**
http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/Seven_Reasons_for_Standards-Based_Grading.aspx
- Wormeli (2006). *Fair Isn't Always Equal*