

More of your Frequently Asked Questions Answered

From: <http://sites.saschina.org/mspudong/2014/10/19/some-of-your-questions-answered/> (Posted by Becky Read on October 19th, 2014)

I have tried to give answers to your questions about Standards-Based Reporting that are both full and clear. Unfortunately, that means that I haven't quite gotten to all of them at this point, but I think this is a good start and I want to post them so you can start reading through them this weekend. I will continue working on these later today and will post again either this evening or tomorrow morning.

Kind Regards,

Becky Read, Principal

1. When/how were parents first notified of this change?

The first parent meeting was in November 2012. Today's meeting was the fourth since then.

2. Why did we change to SBR? How was the old system not serving students and parents?

We want students to develop internal rather than external motivations for learning. This will better prepare them to hold the dispositions they need for success in college and in their careers. Additionally, we felt that students and parents deserved more information about student progress than they were receiving.

3. Why can't we do both SBR and traditional grades?

Leaving grades on the report card and in Power School provides students and parents with a false sense of security. Because a traditional grade includes many different, unrelated factors and "averages" them, students and parents don't know where a student is strong or where the student needs to grow. Averaging can mask an area for growth, preventing us from taking steps to assist the student in overcoming that

challenge. This could have future implications as students enter more and more competitive situations.

4. How will SBR improve education?

It will change the conversation between teachers and students from “how do I get and “A”?” “ to How do I become better at...”. It will help other educators know more precisely where our students are in the curriculum.

5. What are the pros and cons of SBR?

The Pros are:

Assessments and reporting are directly linked to what we want students to know and be able to do.

Students receive feedback on their learning, including information about how to improve.

Students gain their sense of self-worth from what they can do than from a number or letter grade. This will give them strength as they move into the more competitive world of colleges and universities where everyone is an “A” student

The Cons are:

SBR is more time consuming for teachers. It requires them to identify performance criteria (rubrics) for every assessment. It also requires richer commentary.

SBR requires that we completely change how we think of assessment, grading and reporting. It is just not possible to equate a “98” with “exceeds”. This means we have to stop thinking about reporting in ways we are use to. This kind of change can take us out of our comfort zone. With all change, once we’ve done it for a while, it becomes the norm and thereby more comfortable.

6. Is SBR more subjective than traditional grading?

ALL grading has a level of subjectivity. Traditional grades are extremely subjective. They have the façade of objectivity because of averaging. However, the number value assigned to any task or assessment is arbitrary, as is the criteria included in the grade.

SBR is superior because it is transparent. We have rubrics that outline student performance needed to meet each performance criteria. The standards taught and assessed are identified explicitly.

In either reporting method, it is true that the higher the cognitive level of performance expected from a student, the more difficult it is to assess objectively. That is why standardized tests tend to measure low-level skills. Those tests ask students to provide factual answers, in which a “right” or “wrong” answer clearly exists. When students are asked to analyze, synthesis, or evaluate it is much more difficult to have a purely objective rubric. Unfortunately, those are also the most important skills for a student, employee or business person to have (along with good inter-personal skills).

7. How many US states are using SBR?

You will find examples of schools throughout the 50 states using SBR. As accountability to teaching to high standards increases, so does the need to have reporting tied to identified standards. At this point we know of no state that is requiring SBR.

I (Becky Read) have tried to find the data for you. It simply does not exist at this time. I have tried both a simple “Google Search” and I have gone to the U.S. Department of Education’s ERIC Digest. There are many articles in journals and the media about SBR, the vast majority in favor of it. However, it does not appear at this point that anyone has done a study on *how many schools* have adopted it.

8. Will a standards-based reporting transcript decrease my child’s ability to get into a private boarding school in the United States.

That was not our experience last year, but we realize that many people perceive science and math as “different”. I (again, Becky Read) have sent inquires to top private boarding schools in the United States, as identified by Forbes. Their answers will be reported to you on the Blog. The list includes: Phillips Andover, Phillips Exeter, Winsor School, Saint Paul’s School, Roxbury Latin School, Collegiate School, Chapin School, Harvard-Westlake, Lawrenceville School, and Groton School. I’ve also contacted Kimball Union Academy in Meridan, NH, near my home in Vermont, because I know many of their graduates attend Dartmouth College. Dartmouth is one of the Ivy League colleges. If you are considering a

school not on the above list, I will be happy to contact them. Simply e-mail me at Becky.Read@saschina.org.

9. How can we make sure the students will be ready for the high school grading system?

By shifting discussion from grades to learning, we will create students who think about how they learn best, becoming more self-directed and better self-advocates. With those skills they will be successful in any learning environment, regardless of the reporting system used.

10. How can the students and parents know the kids progress objectively?

Students certainly learn and develop cognitively at different rates. SBR is a criterion-referenced system. In other words, we measure student performance against a set expectation of what they should know and be able to do.

Although this is not necessarily a part of the question, we should address norm-referenced assessment here. Norms do not hold students to any criteria for achievement. Rather, they measure student performance and distribute students along a “bell curve”. A traditional bell curve has 10 % of people at either end of the spectrum (either superior and it’s opposite), 15% at either end as high achieving or low achieving, and 50% somewhere in the middle. So theoretically you could have a group of all superior students, placed along this curve, or all low performing students placed along the curve. Although you can tell how your child does in comparison with other students, it doesn’t tell you whether all of the students are learning well or whether they are all learning poorly, or something in-between.

Standardized tests, such as MAP (Measures of Academic Progress), do a good job of providing you with information about where your child stands in relation to his/her peers because of the sample size they use for norming. Grades tend to be less reliable because of the (small) sample size and subjectivity as discussed before. A word of caution... standardized tests do suffer a bit from cultural bias. That should always be kept in mind, and is why a good assessment system uses multiple measures of student performance.

11. How will parents clearly understand their children’s school performance?

SBR will give you information about the learning your child has achieved. If you have questions about this, please speak to your child’s teacher. However, keep in

mind our performance criteria. When a child receives *formative feedback* from a teacher it tells the child how well he/she is learning a standard or an aspect of a standard (the teacher should also have relayed what the child needs to do to improve). Although formative assessments do not count towards the final progress criteria, a “**beginning**” means a child has a lot to learn, an “**approaching**” means there is still material to learn, and a “**meeting**” means that the child has done what is asked of him/her in the standard and should seek to expand his/her understanding and application into analysis, synthesis and evaluation activities in order to ultimately achieve “**exceeding**”.

When given a feedback on a *summative assessment*, a child is receiving feedback on learning at a fixed period of time, such as the end of the unit. Again, “**beginning**” and “**approaching**” mean that the child was not able to gain all the knowledge or skills required in the standard. The child should receive information about exactly what he/she still need sto learn. “**Meeting**” means that a child knows and can do what is outlined in the standard. “**Exceeding**” means a child can do more with the ideas and concepts than was required in the standard. Our staff is scheduled for a series of meetings to solidify our understanding of this and ensure that it is held in common by us so that students receive similar messages about expectations.

12. Who set up/modified the standards?

1. a. **For more information about the standards, I encourage you to visit the following websites:**

- i. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- ii. <http://www.nextgenscience.org/>

These were adopted in math and science last year after teams of administrators, curriculum writers, and teachers reviewed many sets of standards. They were adopted for their rigor.

Many people do not know that in the United States Constitution, one of the powers not given to the federal government and so given to each state is over education. The Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards did NOT come from the federal government. Media reports to the contrary are driven by a highly polarized political climate and are inaccurate.

The standards came from a consortium of Chief Education Officers who realized that there is a need for consistently high standards and supporting materials that few states had the resources for. The standards selected were based upon those in the HIGHEST performing New England states and were benchmarked against two international tests, the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study).

13. Standards-based reporting requires teachers to put a lot of time and effort into closely tracking student behavior (and progress). Are our teachers prepared for this? How have our teachers been trained for SBR?

Teachers were on the 2011 task force that investigated standards-based grading. Our teachers were asked to read *Standards-Based Grading*, by Thomas Guskey and most attended a two-day weekend workshop in September that was on standards-based grading. The workshop was followed up with two days of coaching by the workshop presenter. Teachers are meeting daily with team members for 60 minutes and have additional personal prep time. Departments are being given release time to calibrate rubrics and progress criteria.

13. Will all students be evaluated against the same standards?

Yes. All students will be evaluated against the same department reporting standards, which are directly linked to curriculum standards adopted by the school. For math and science, these are the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards from the United States. For more information on these, please visit:

www.nextgenscience.org

<http://www.corestandards.org/Math/>

For an article comparing the Common Core State Standards for Math to Singapore Math, please visit:

<http://www.achieve.org/CCSSandSingapore>

14. Will students taking different level courses be evaluated against the same standards?

Our Chinese classes have a separate, related set of curriculum standards for each level. The reporting standards are the same. So that “speaking” for instance is more sophisticated with each progressive level. The same is true for mathematics. If a student is taking Geometry, there are specific Geometry curriculum standards they are being taught to, although reporting standards will be the same, the curriculum standard link will be different.

15. Will our high school adopt SBR soon? If so, when?

Although our high school has adopted many progressive grading practices (elimination of the “zero”, allowing for retaking assessments), there are no plans at this time for them to move to standards-based reporting.

16. Will SAS convert transcripts to letter grades when students transfer? If yes, what is the formula for doing that?

There will be a cover sheet explaining our reporting system to any future schools. It would be inaccurate to convert a standards-based report card to grades.