

Standards/target based grading Q&A

Q - My son/daughter is a high achieving student who works hard, does his/her homework, cares about their performance in his/her classroom, shouldn't they be rewarded for this as opposed to those who don't care about school or their classes?

A - Learning is the ultimate reward for all students. We believe ALL students can learn and All students who work hard, commit to practice, and express concern about their performance will reap the benefits of their learning evidenced in post-secondary enrollment options.

Q - Our teachers are learning this system. How can we assure that our students and their records are not adversely impacted by this change?

A - While our teachers are working to define the tools that most appropriately align with their instruction, at the core of their work is to utilize their experience and expertise to assess student *learning*. Regardless of the tools that each teacher uses, they continue to measure learning that is exhibited in classroom. Whether that is reported through a percentage point system or proficiency target, our teachers continue to assess student learning.

Q - In a competitive world, it seems like we are not giving our high achieving students the advantage over students who take advantage of systems like this in order to inflate their grades. How will our students stack up against other students given this change in the way grades are reflected?

A - Reassessment is not about inflating grades but rather enhancing learning for all students. As a result, all students will be provided the opportunities to remediate their misunderstandings to ensure that learning gaps are being appropriately addressed. It is the belief of Neenah High School that each student comes to school each day with a unique set of circumstances. It is our intention to provide each individual student with the greatest chance for success in each classroom at Neenah High School. This means that some students may need to re-take an assessment while others do not. In the end, we can be certain that *all* students have been held to a standard that assures they realize their maximum growth as a student. It should also be noted that Neenah High School held a forum with representatives from Marquette University, UW-Oshkosh, St. Norbert College, Fox Valley Technical College, and members of the local business community to gain a better understanding of this process and its impact on college admissions. Each of the representatives indicated that the move to standards/target based assessment is certainly not unique to Neenah High School. Additionally, they indicated that this approach often provides them with more detailed information about the student allowing them to make more informed decisions about admissions.

Q - This new system of grading seems like it may have an adverse effect on the mental health of students as they may not be receiving immediate, clear, and timely feedback from teachers. How can you assure that our students will be supported from a mental health perspective as we make this transition?

A- The cornerstone of standards/target based assessment is meaningful feedback from teacher to student. Research and experience suggests that providing students with a safe approach to practice the application of their knowledge only serves to enhance the understanding between student and teacher about what is needed to make sure each student realizes his/her full potential.

Q - Only 35% of students receive a college degree. What feedback have you received from industry as it relates to employability essentials vs. demonstrated content knowledge?

A - Employers have made it clear that they are looking for employees that are capable of being flexible thinkers and problem solvers. Standards/target based learning allows teachers greater flexibility to create authentic learning scenarios to allow for application of multiple skills. Further, the assurance that all students are held accountable to proficiency, will instill a resilient mindset in our students that mistakes are opportunities for growth. Our community partners have indicated that resilience is of primary importance to them.

Q - Experts in assessment suggest that if a formative task is given a grade, then it isn't truly formative. Has Neenah High School discussed the move to a 100% summative / 0% formative approach to grading?

A - As our teachers continue to implement standards/target based assessment structures, they will continue to highlight homework as *practice*. We intend to give greater emphasis in reporting the performance as opposed to the practice leading up to the performance (the summative assessment). Neenah High School staff and administration will continue to discuss the merits of the 100% summative/0% formative approach to reporting grades. This has yet to be determined as a school wide policy.

Q - Did the research done by NJSD indicate that it is easier to roll out a standards based system in a district that has only one high school and one middle school? What are the implications for our elementary schools?

A - Elementary schools within NJSD adopted this approach to assessment several years ago. Given that we are a one high school district, we did not conduct extensive research into districts with multiple high schools.

Q - Are colleges and universities using this system? If not, how can we make sure our kids are prepared for life after Neenah High School?

A - It would be difficult to provide a definitive answer on whether or not colleges and universities are uniformly adopting a standards/target based approach to grading. Post-secondary grading practices are typically more varied than those at the secondary level. Neenah High School feels strongly that assuring that our students are, at a minimum, proficient on important learning standards that are vital for college success will most certainly provide them a greater opportunity for success beyond Neenah High School. An intense focus on learning related to vital learning standards required for post-secondary success will most certainly prepare our students for life after Neenah High School. It should also be noted that Neenah High School held a forum with representatives from Marquette University, UW-Oshkosh, St. Norbert College, Fox Valley Technical College, and members of the local business community to gain a better understanding of this process and its impact on college admissions. Each of the representatives indicated that the move to standards/target based assessment is certainly not unique to Neenah High School. Additionally, they indicated that this approach often provides them with more detailed information about the student allowing them to make more informed decisions about admissions.

Q - What is NHS doing to ensure teachers are being properly supported and professional developed to ensure consistency of implementation?

A - An intense focus on assessment has been at the center of NHS professional development since at least 2011. During the 2017-18 school year, each professional learning day includes three hours of intense professional development on standards/target based learning and assessment. Additionally, each department invests time each month in evaluating and aligning learning targets in like courses and throughout their department.

Q - How are students being taught about the basics of standards/target based grading and what role can they serve in the process of implementation?

A - Students of teachers utilizing standards/target based assessment have engaged in an extensive introduction to the process and its value. Students have been involved in this process at varying levels since 2014. NHS continues to provide students with opportunities to provide feedback and will continue to do so until full implementation by the 2019-20 school year.

Q - It seems like teachers at NHS are using a variety of systems throughout NHS. How can you help support kids in assuring that they are able to make sense of the multitude of grading systems currently going on at NHS?

A - Our teachers have been asked to clearly communicate grading structures to students just as they have in the past. While the percentage point system that has been in place at Neenah

High School is comfortable to most, it can be stated with relative certainty that teachers have always utilized grading structures that most appropriately fit their classroom, the content, and their instructional approach. Regular, deep, meaningful feedback is at the core of this approach and thus, students should expect that feedback relative to learning targets will be a constant regardless of the nuances of a particular instructor's approach to reporting grades.

Q - Does NHS have clear benchmarks for implementation and roll out of the standards/target based grading?

A - NHS has identified 2019-20 as the school year in which full implementation will occur. Pilot studies within identified departments and like courses continue to provide us feedback as we approach implementation in 2019-20.

Q - Explain the process used to pilot standards/target based grading vs. entire school systemic roll-out.

A - Pilot groups have been utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of different reporting mechanisms, proficiency levels, and tools supporting standards/target based grading. This will allow our district curriculum, instruction, and assessment team to vet the processes that are most beneficial for our overall student, teacher, and parent populations.

Q - What will future communication to the community look and sound like?

A - There are three remaining Parent Voices meetings during the 2017-18 school year at which standards/target based grading will be discussed. Parents can expect information regarding this transition regularly as we move closer to full implementation in 2019-20.

Q - Our Juniors and Seniors are at the end of their careers at NHS. Will this system adversely impact them as they learn this new system when the stakes are higher for them than others?

A - Student learning has and will continue to be at the center of instruction and assessment at Neenah High School. All students will continue to be provided letter grades. As our staff continues to refine its practice, we can more confidently ensure that a letter grade is more indicative of student learning and not the accumulation of points that may or may not be connected to learning targets.

Q - Does freshman seminar include a topic of how to navigate this environment and are they taught how to seek and use feedback from teachers?

A - It does not currently, but this is a great suggestion that we will definitely consider moving forward.

Q - How do you ensure that students do not abuse the system of opting out of assessments if they are not “ready”?

A - The process of reassessment has been in place for several years. Our research and our experience have revealed that, when given the choice, students would prefer to excel on an assessment the first time so they do not have to schedule additional time to re-assess their skills.

Q - Is there a way to better manage the times that retakes can be taken outside of the school day?

A - Our current, seven-period schedule presents challenges in this area. NHS is currently engaged in the exploration of new schedule structures that support enrichment and reassessment for students within the school day.

Q - What controls are in place to ensure cohesion of learning among like-content and grade level courses?

A - We are in the process of using district professional learning time to ensure that our departments have common understandings and practices in place to make our 6-12 transition to standards/target based assessment in 2019 one that can be done with fidelity in all curricular areas.

Q - What is the give-up or breaking point if a student is unable to demonstrate a proficient level of learning?

A - Neenah High School holds as its core value that “all students can and will be successful because of the work we do.” Provided students are responsible in exhibiting their continued effort toward addressing gaps in learning, our staff will continue to work with students until proficiency is met.