

Standards-Based Report Card Q & A

The Middletown Township Public School District uses Standards-Based Report Cards (SBRC) for grades K-5. The change to a Standards-Based Report Card several years ago came from the belief that our previous traditional type report card did not fully communicate what students are expected to know and be able to do as set forth by a set of standards. Currently in New Jersey, the set of standards being assessed are known as the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). Middletown was one of the first local districts to implement this type of reporting which has now become the norm not only locally, but nationally. A SBRC benefits students, teachers, and parents/guardians by stating what is expected in the academic content areas, and how well the student is progressing towards his/her grade level standards for those areas.

This past spring, the district sought feedback from parents, staff and administrators as we began a reassessment of our SBRC. A committee was formed to examine that feedback and redesign our SBRC with the goal of creating a more valuable home-school communication tool. This Q & A provides overall background knowledge on the SBRC and, specifically, the changes made. We look forward to our continued working together to strengthen the home-school connection.

1. What is Standards Based grade reporting?

A Standards-Based grade reporting system is designed to inform parents about their child's progress towards achieving specific learning standards. The New Jersey Student Learning Standards establish high and challenging performance expectations for all students. They describe what students should know and be able to do, and serve as the basis for our curriculum, instruction and assessment model.

2. Why do we use a SBRC?

A SBRC provides more information to parents about student progress. On a traditional report card, students receive one grade for reading, one for math, one for science, and so on. On a Standards-Based Report Card, each of these subject areas is further expanded by a list of skills and knowledge students are responsible for learning. Students receive a separate grade for each item on the list.

3. What is the purpose of the SBRC?

The purpose of the Standards-Based Report Card is to provide feedback that is more detailed to parents regarding the progress their child is making towards specific content indicators at each grade level. It allows parents and students to understand more clearly what is expected at each grade level. With this understanding, parents are better able to guide and support their child and to help him/her be successful in a rigorous academic program.

4. How does the Standards-Based Report Card compare to the traditional letter grade system?

With traditional letter grade reporting, grades are often calculated by combining how well the student met a teacher's expectations, how the student performed on assignments and tests, how much effort the teacher believes the student put in, and how the student is doing in comparison to classmates. Letter grades do not tell parents which skills their child has mastered or whether he or she is working at grade level. The Standards-Based Report Card is different in that it measures how well an individual student is doing in relation to the grade level standards, not the work of other students. This gives parents a better understanding of their child's strengths and weaknesses and helps to encourage all students to do their best.

5. Can a student exceed the standards for his/her grade level?

In order to answer this question, it is important to understanding the concept of exceeding the Standard. Exceeding is not the equivalent of an A on a traditional report card. For example, if a fifth-grader received A's on every math test during the marking period, he or she would probably receive an A on a traditional report card. If those math tests measured only the concepts fifth graders are expected to master, those A's would be the equivalent of meeting the standard on a Standards-Based Report Card; the student is doing what he or she should be doing very well, but not necessarily more. Standards-Based Report Cards encourage students to demonstrate their ability to apply skills and knowledge beyond benchmark expectations.

When a student demonstrates his/her ability to apply a thorough in-depth knowledge of basic and extended concepts and skills with performance characterized by self-motivation, and the ability to apply skills with consistent accuracy, independence, and a high level of quality, the student would earn an "E" for exceeding performance.

6. How can a parent help his/her child to understand his/her grades?

It is important that parents and teachers have honest conversations with students. Some concepts and skills are more difficult to grasp than others, but given time and motivation students can continually challenge themselves. Attitudes are contagious and it is important that the adults involved convey to the child that learning is a process that needs to be respected. A grade of 2 while learning a new skill or concept is appropriate. A grade of 3 demonstrating mastery is to be celebrated. A grade of "E" indicates a strength being recognized that is above and beyond the grade level expectations.

7. What is the difference between a grade of 1, 2, and 3?

Learning is a process and it should be expected that repeated exposure and experiences are necessary to gain ownership of new skills and strategies. An assessment score of 2 indicates the student is progressing towards the standard. Once a student demonstrates thorough understanding and performance is characterized by ability to consistently apply skills with accuracy and quality, he or she would receive a 3. Students earning a 1 are experiencing difficulty with the concept/skill even with consistent teacher prompting and support.

8. What specifically are the changes I will see on the resigned SBRC?

- **Marking Periods:** The first change is the number of reporting periods as we move to trimester, or three times a year, reporting. Learning is developmental and greater time between reporting periods is needed to more accurately report on a student's progress.
- **Grading and Rubrics for Each Trimester:** Another change is each grade level has a detailed companion rubric for each indicator for each trimester. In order to achieve a 3 on our prior report card a student had to reach the end of the year grade level standard. This meant that the majority of our students were scoring a 2, or perhaps a 2+, in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd marking periods, and ending the year in the 4th marking period with a 3. Feedback from many parents conveyed the sentiment that their child was predictably a 2-2-2-3 on most indicators in most years. With our redesigned SBRC, students can achieve a score of 1, 2, 3, or E based upon the skills/concepts taught within each trimester period as detailed on the rubric, with the last trimester reflecting reaching the end of the grade level standard.
- **What happened to the 2+?** On our original SBRC, we wanted to be able to discern the student who was progressing very well to achieving the end of the grade standard, but who was not quite there yet. With the detailed rubric for each indicator each trimester, this need no longer exists.
- **What does "M" mean?** The M reflects modifications as detailed in a student's special education Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), to support his/her progress with grade level standards as assessed on the report card. An M will appear next to the subject area(s) in which a student's program has been modified, as detailed in the IEP.