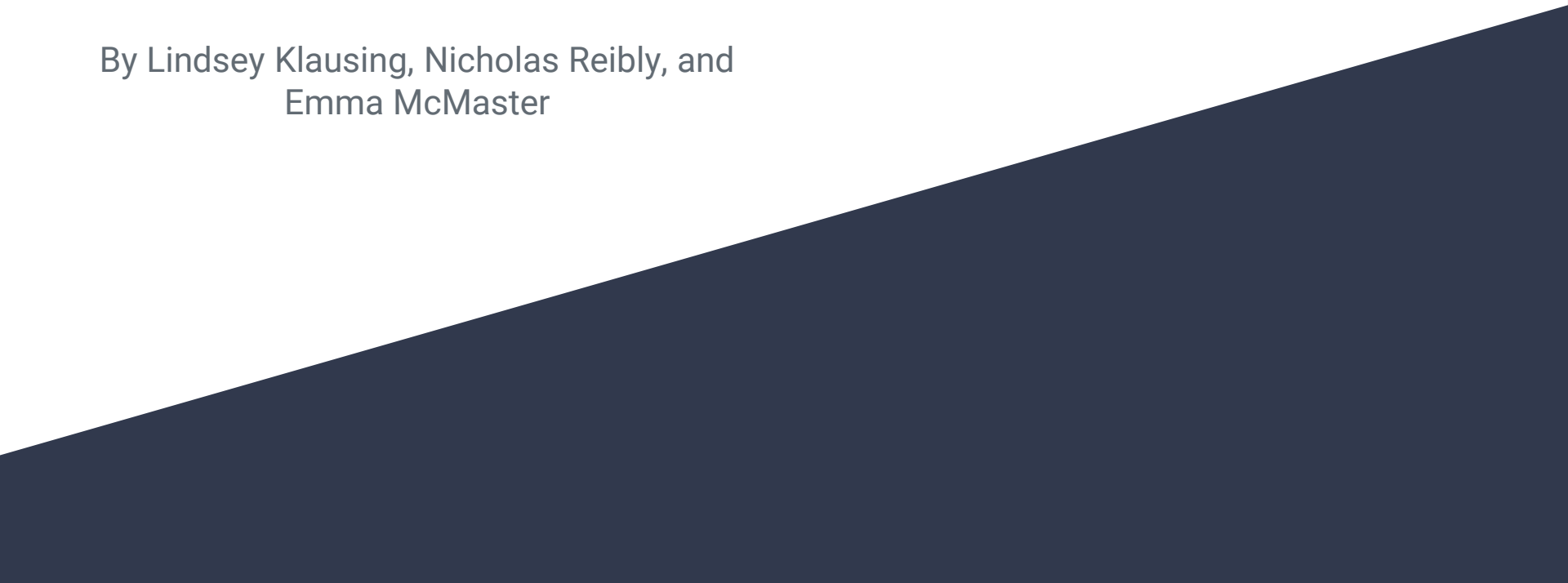


Standards-Based Grading

By Lindsey Klausning, Nicholas Reibly, and
Emma McMaster

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What is Standards-Based Grading?

According to Common Goal Systems Inc. (n.d.), standards-based grading is a system that focuses on rating a student's mastery of certain standards. While traditional grading systems simply give a letter grade to show overall performance, standards-based grading allows teachers to give a number or color ranking to a student's performance based on a certain standard. The student moves up the ranking as their mastery increases, and this increases instructional differentiation because it allows the teacher to see where a student is in their understanding.

What is Standards-Based Grading?

Common Goal Systems Inc. (n.d.) mentions that this also allows teachers, students, and parents to see where the student is struggling and succeeding, giving a more detailed picture of the student's performance and level of mastery. Standards-based grading allows students to see exactly what is required of them, decreasing anxiety about getting all of the points on an assignment or assessment. This also helps students become motivated to master the information instead of simply pursuing a good grade/doing extra credit for more points, as standards-based grading is focused on the student's understanding instead of their work completion.

What is standards-based grading?

This video from Common Goal Systems Inc. (n.d.) provides a thorough explanation about standards-based grading. Common Goal Systems Inc. (n.d.) supports standards-based grading, but the purpose of this presentation is strictly informative, so the showing of this video is not intended to persuade you to support standards-based grading.



What do educators in the field think about standards-based grading?

We wanted to provide a more well-rounded perspective about standards-based grading, so we interviewed three teachers about their feelings regarding this system of evaluation.

Jay Clark



Principal at Van Buren Middle School

Are you for or against the standards-based grading system? Why?

I am in favor of grading that leans more toward standards-based. While we aren't completely standards-based at VBMS (we still give a letter grade and average scores), our philosophy is that of standards-based learning. When implemented, SBG/SBL evaluates students' understanding of content. Traditional grading clouds a student's understanding in the content with other factors (whether or not they turned in something, etc.) and allows for only one opportunity to demonstrate learning.

How long have you been exposed to SBG?

I started learning more about SBG approximately seven years ago.

What role did you play? (administrator, student, teacher, etc.)

I really facilitated conversations (as the administrator) that led to making building-wide changes. As with any change we want to 'stick', it had to be the teachers' idea, not mine and we really focused on the philosophy (the WHY), not just HOW we were implementing this. The more we talked, the more our staff determined that traditional grading lacked integrity and just really encouraged students to play the "game" of school, but wasn't focused on learning.

What are the advantages of this method?

Mirrors authentic learning; having more than one opportunity to assess, learn, demonstrate learning. A more accurate way to truly determine student learning and academic needs. Provides alignment - no 'surprises' for students.

What are the disadvantages of this method?

For most students (and parents), this is unfamiliar - because educators have 'trained' them to worry about scores and letter grades, then they just want their child to play the game of school, which may not focus on learning.

What challenges have you faced with this method?

Educating students and their families. When we hire new teachers, we have to educate them.

Do you feel this system can be applied equally across all subjects? Why or why not?

Yes. All subjects have standards and we should be assessing against those standards.

Karen Dishong



7th Grade Language Arts Teacher at
Van Buren Middle School

Are you for or against the standards-based grading system? Why?

I am for SBG because I know my students better and what they know or don't know. SBG lets me know if students have mastered a standard or not because they have a learning target to meet with evidence. Also the students track their progress so they know if they have mastered a standard as well. They know the expectations and if they know the material or not. Not just seeing what grade they can get and point chasing.

How long have you been exposed to SBG?

Five years

What role did you play? (administrator, student, teacher, etc.)

A teacher but also I served on the SBG committee to inform the staff about how SBG was going to work.

What are the advantages of this method?

Know students better and what is used for their grade...for me answers the question, what is a grade? what does the grade represent...not extra credit, not at home projects, etc. I get to see what the students know.

What are the disadvantages of this method?

The amount of time and how we use got it, needs improvement, don't get it, inputting to progressbook, if we should use numbers or colors

What challenges have you faced with this method?

Colors or numbers to represent mastery, how to record in ProgressBook, staff buy in, teachers actually putting in the work so we are all consistent and communicating that to parents

Do you feel this system can be applied equally across all subjects? Why or why not?

It can be but I feel the teachers deserve the right to tweak SBG so it fits their content area without going crazy -everyone should be doing SBG but it may not look exactly the same in all content areas!

Mark Bunn



8th Grade Math Teacher at Van Buren
Middle School

Are you for or against the standards-based grading system? Why?

I agree with the concept, but not fully convinced that it is the best system. I like when we were able to grade homework. That held the kids accountable for their work, which in turn helped them get better grades on assessments. I will say it is easy to reassess a student that struggled on a particular standard. Rather than having them re-take a full test, they just need to retake the standards that they were not proficient in.

How long have you been exposed to SBG?

We have been exposed for several years here at VB.

What role did you play? (administrator, student, teacher, etc.)

I played the teacher role. We didn't just go straight to SBG. We worked on it over several years before we fully implemented it. Which is the best way!

What are the advantages of this method?

I believe you can hone in on a student's weakness. As well as the parents can see what area their child is struggling with and work with them at home. (we hope that happens) Also it allows the students to actually see what areas they struggle with and need to work on. We keep a running learning target track sheet for all students which they keep track. It is pretty slick.

What are the disadvantages of this method?

Puts more pressure on test and quizzes. Since this is the only method to acquire grades. Several students then just don't do the homework because they feel they know the content well enough. Work ethic and completion of homework is falling fast.

What challenges have you faced with this method?

Making assessments to each standard. Then tracking all the information. If done right, it takes a LOT of time.

Do you feel this system can be applied equally across all subjects? Why or why not?

I don't feel it can be applied equally for all subjects. There are so many standards you can put together. One question for math can have 10 standards attached to it if you really look at it. Language arts is a mess as well.

Now it's your turn

We wanted to do this presentation to help others learn more about standards-based grading and offer various perspectives from educators who are using this system in their own classrooms. We hope this has been helpful and educational for you, and we encourage you to develop your own opinions regarding standards-based grading. Thank you so much for looking through our presentation, and we hope you have a wonderful day!

References

Common Goal Systems Inc. (n.d.) *What is standards-based grading?*

<https://teacherease.com/standards-based-grading.aspx>