

Vestal Central School District

K-5 Standards-Based Report Cards



Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The Vestal Central School District has been implementing standards-based report cards at the elementary level for approximately ten years. A traditional report card provides a score and summary comment in each subject area. By breaking down learning into specific competencies, standards-based report cards provide more detailed information about what your child knows, understands and can do. The purpose of the report card is to communicate to parents, students and staff the progress each student is making toward accomplishing the New York State performance-based standards.

1. Question: Why standards-based report cards at Vestal?

State and federal initiatives have ushered in a focus on standards-based education. Furthermore, standards-based report cards have been implemented state-wide and nationally over the last twenty years. They increase opportunities for early feedback on student growth. Standards-based report cards also promote consistency in the expectations held by teachers at the same grade level.

2. Question: What are standards-based report cards?

Standards-based report cards are based on grade-level learning standards and competencies. Unlike traditional “lump-sum” grading systems (for all of their combined work, a student earns a “B” or an “82”), student learning is communicated on several specific standards. This feedback both informs instruction and allows for all stakeholders to understand exactly where students stand in relation to grade-level learning standards. Rather than combine achievement, attendance, attitude, effort, and behavior into one “lump-sum” grade, a standards-based report card provides a clearer picture of a student’s academic growth.

3. Question: What are “standards” and how are they identified?

The New York State Education Department writes the standards for each grade level. Each content area has a list of learning standards. Standards are a list of skills and competencies that each child should be able to know and demonstrate in a given grade and subject area. The following is a list of the standards in the four core subject areas:

- ✓ [New York State Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards](#)
- ✓ [New York State Next Generation Mathematics Learning Standards](#)
- ✓ [The New York State K-8 Social Studies Framework](#)
- ✓ [New York State P-12 Science Learning Standards](#)

4. Question: Why are all standards not listed on the report card?

The standards themselves are detailed multi-page documents that would be too long to put on a report card. Teams of teachers have reviewed the standards for each grade level, and listed those which were considered most significant to students' learning in each grade level.

5. Question: How does a teacher grade my child?

Teachers look to a variety of sources to assess students' growth and achievement throughout the marking period. These include tests, written work, presentations, in-class observations and class participation. Each trimester, teachers also administer universal screening assessments in reading and mathematics. Along with a holistic balance of information from other sources, teachers and administrators analyze screening data and use it to make instructional decisions.

Standards-based report cards note students' current level of performance on specific academic and social competencies. Attendance, behavior, and effort are assessed separately from academic achievement. By showing what a child knows and can do for each separate competency, parents gain a more detailed picture of their child's progress.

6. Question: How do standards-based grades differ from traditional grades?

There is strong research showing that a single letter or overall percentage grade is not a good way to report student achievement in any subject area because it is often subjective and cannot present the level of detailed feedback necessary for effective learning. (*Guskey & Brookhart. 2019. What we know about grading: What works, what doesn't, and what's next.*)

The standards-based approach (4, 3, 2, 1) provides information about student achievement without the need for an overall grade. There is simply no correlation between a 4, 3, 2, 1 and a numeric/letter grade.

7. Question: How are proficiency levels defined on the standards-based report card?

Proficiency Levels are defined using the following criteria:

4 – Demonstrates with Mastery (exceeds expectations)

- Students who earn a 4 are able to apply concepts learned in class and transfer that knowledge to other situations.

3 – Demonstrates Independently (*meets expectations*)

- *Students who earn a 3 are on grade level. They demonstrate an ability to analyze and synthesize concepts learned in class.*

2 – Demonstrates with Support (progressing towards expectations)

- Students who earn a 2 are progressing towards grade level with support and/or can apply content learned in a literal context.

1 – Not demonstrated at this Time (*area of concern*)

- *Students who earn a 1 are struggling with this competency.*

NA – This skill is not assessed at this time.

8. Question: What does the 4, 3, 2, 1 grading scheme look like in practice?

For Second Grade, “Applies Basic Map Skills” is an assessed competency. Here is an example of what that may look like in practice:

Student earning a “4:” Can identify important map locations, analyze how geographic location impacts the way people live, and transfers that knowledge to ways in which her/his family had to adapt when they moved from Arizona to Upstate New York.

- Not only does this student understand map skills, she/he can apply the knowledge and transfer it to ways in which geographic location impacts her/his life. This student is above grade level.

Student earning a “3:” Can identify important map locations and analyze how geographic location impacts the way people live (i.e., people living in a cold climate would live differently than those in a hotter climate).

- This student understands map skills and has applied that learning in a meaningful way (that geography impacts the way people live their lives). This student is on grade level. In the past, this student would have earned an “A” or a 90+% on their report card. This is a good place to be!

Student earning a “2:” Can identify important map locations (continents, oceans, etc) and is beginning to make connections on how those facts impact people’s lives.

- This student can literally apply their learning (identify map locations) but is still making progress on the analysis piece. This student is considered “progressing towards” grade level.

Student earning a “1:” Student is still making progress towards identifying important map locations.

- This student requires significant support to identify important map locations. This student is considered below grade level.

9. Question: Can my child actually perform at a level 3 and then move to a lower performance level on the next quarter?

This is possible. A student may perform at a ‘3’ one trimester, but not demonstrate the same level of proficiency during the next marking period. It is also possible that some concepts may not be assessed in each of the three marking periods.

10. Question: Where are comments found?

Standards-based report cards contain narrative summative comments at the end of the report card. Narrative comments are individualized for every student. The classroom teacher types narrative comments, which remain on the report card for the entire school year.

Comments are essential as they differentiate between “reporting” and “grading.” With these report cards, students are “graded” on their learning as related to specific competencies. Non-academic factors such as attitude, behavior, and homework completion can be separately “reported” using the comments section.

11. Question: What should I do if my student is either exceeding standards or not meeting their grade-level standards?

As with any instructional concern, the appropriate step is to communicate with your student’s classroom teacher. Because a standards-based report card specifies learning competencies by the student’s grade level, a deeper conversation can ensue.

For example, contrast the two questions resulting from the different reporting methods:

Traditional Report Card: “I see my student is earning a “C” in Math. What are they learning and how can I help?”

Standards-Based Report Card: “I see that my student is below grade-level in multiplication tables. What strategies could I use to help with this skill?”

With standards-based reporting, conversations become centered on student academic growth and achievement.

12. Question: What about art, music, and physical education?

As essential aspects of a student’s learning and growth, these specialty areas will be evaluated on the standards-based report cards. While special area teachers are responsible for inputting their own assessments, they may collaborate with classroom teachers in the report card’s narrative comment section.

13. Question: What about special services, such as reading, speech, special education, etc.?

The report cards will not indicate a child’s status in special programs. Instead, you will receive a separate progress report inside the report card envelope regarding your child’s progress in services such as speech.

14. Question: What if I still have questions?

This brief overview of standards-based report cards may generate further questions. If so, contact your student’s classroom teacher, and/or contact your student’s building principal. Each building’s contact information is contained on the “Schools” tab off the Vestal website (<https://www.vestal.stier.org/>).