

Standards-Based Grading Through Curriculum Adoption

Using Curriculum Alignment to Improve Clarity, Consistency, and Communication

Session Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Understand how curriculum adoption can strengthen standards-based grading practices
 - Examine a process for identifying priority standards and aligning evidence collection
 - Explore practical gradebook and reporting structures
 - Reflect on communication strategies with families
 - Identify next steps for implementation within their own systems
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Why We Started

The Rationale

We Needed:

- Greater consistency between classrooms
 - Clearer expectations for proficiency
 - Better alignment between curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting
 - More meaningful communication with families
 - A grading system focused on learning rather than compliance
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Curriculum Adoption as the Catalyst

Curriculum Adoption Gave Us:

- A shared instructional resource
- Common pacing and language
- Opportunities to align assessments
- Clearer conversations about proficiency
- A foundation for collaborative PLC work

Where We Began: Math

We Started with Math

Why Math?

- Clearly defined standards progression
- Easier to identify essential learning
- Existing curriculum alignment tools
- Stronger assessment structures

Identifying Priority Standards

Step 1: Priority Standards

Our Process:

1. Reviewed state standards
2. Used Achieve the Core major clusters
3. Compared standards to Bridges curriculum
4. Determined the most essential standards
5. Created a district priority standards docume

Priority Standards Document

Example: Math Priority Standards Spreadsheet

Included:

- Priority standards
- Curriculum alignment
- Unit references
- Assessment opportunities

Why This Helped:

- Increased vertical alignment
 - Improved teacher clarity
 - Streamlined assessment conversations
 - Helped teams focus on essential learning
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Defining Proficiency

Step 2: Defining What Proficiency Looks Like

We Created:

Math Explanation of Units Document

Included:

- Priority standards
 - Learning targets
 - Student-friendly language
 - Evidence sources
 - Unit connections
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Learning Targets

Step 3: Developing Learning Targets

Learning Targets Helped Us:

- Break standards into manageable skills
- Clarify instruction
- Align evidence collection
- Improve student understanding
- Support feedback conversations

Speaker Notes:

“The learning target work was probably the most impactful instructional shift for teachers.”

Parent-Friendly Language

Making Standards Understandable for Families

We Added:

- Parent-friendly report card language
- Clear descriptions of skills
- Simplified wording without losing rigor

Why It Matters:

Families need to understand:

- What is being assessed
- What proficiency means
- How learning develops over time

Designing the Gradebook

Step 4: Building the Gradebook

Our Guiding Questions:

- What evidence matters most?
- How much evidence is enough?
- What should teachers actually enter?
- How do we make trends visible?

Important Mindset Shift:

The gradebook became a tool for:

- Tracking learning
- Identifying needs
- Guiding instruction

NOT simply calculating points.

Math Gradebook Structure

Math Gradebook Features

Included:

- Color coding for learning targets
- Evidence categories
- Multiple evidence opportunities
- Designations:
 - M = Meets
 - A = Approaching
 - NS = Needs Support

Benefits:

- Easier identification of trends
- Better intervention decisions
- Stronger instructional responses

Reading the Gradebook

Using the Gradebook to Inform Instruction

Teachers Learned to Look For:

- Patterns across standards
- Students consistently approaching proficiency
- Missing evidence
- Need for reteaching
- Intervention groups

Important Point:

The gradebook is primarily a teacher tool.

It is NOT intended to be shared directly with parents.

Communicating Through Report Cards

Step 5: Report Cards

Our Goals:

- Clear communication
- Developmentally appropriate expectations
- Consistency across classrooms
- Evidence-based reporting

Important Conversations with Families:

- Growth takes time
- “Approaching” is often expected early in the year
- Mastery may not occur until later quarters

Report Card Talking Points

Important Parent Communication Strategies

We Explained:

- Why some areas were greyed out in earlier quarters
- Why mastery may not yet appear
- How evidence supports reporting decisions
- That learning is developmental

Helpful Phrase:

“Approaching is not failing. It shows your child is progressing toward end-of-year expectations.”

The Role of PLCs

Continuous Improvement Through PLC Work

PLC Conversations Focused On:

- Reviewing evidence
- Calibrating proficiency
- Discussing interventions
- Refining learning targets

- Improving consistency

This Was Never “Finished”

The process continues to evolve every year.

Impact on Teaching & Learning

How This Changed Our Practice

Teachers Became More Intentional About:

- Learning targets
- Evidence collection
- Feedback
- Intervention
- Instructional alignment

Conversations Shifted From:

“What grade did they get?”

to

“What does the student understand?”

Expanding Beyond Math

Moving Into Literacy & Other Areas

Next Steps Included:

- Literacy alignment
- Science and social studies discussions
- Vertical articulation
- Continued refinement of report cards
- Stronger intervention systems

Key Takeaway:

Start small. Build clarity first.

