

Curriculum Corner

November 19, 2016

Issue #2

Curriculum Corner

This newsletter is designed to provide ongoing information across the district, allowing parents to develop an awareness of the great things that are happening in the Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union. In hopes of increasing communication throughout ARSU, the Curriculum Corner will be published monthly.

If parents have any suggestion for future Curriculum Corner topics, please do not hesitate to contact me at sherri.nichols@arsu.org or at 802-265-4905.

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is a tool for assessing readers. As a part of this assessment, your child is asked to read an unfamiliar text. While he/she reads, the assessor makes notes of his/her accuracy and fluency. The assessor is particularly interested in how he/she tackles unknown or difficult words and phrases. After reading, your child is prompted to talk about the text. This helps to gain valuable insight into his/her comprehension (how well he/she understands what was read).

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System defines gradient levels of text that progress from A to Z with increasing demands on the reader as the texts become more difficult. Knowing your child's reading level helps teachers match your child(ren) with appropriate books for both instruction and for independent reading, and the skills and strategies that need to be taught to support your child in becoming a more proficient reader.

For the past two years we have been using the second edition of this assessment system. This year we will be using the new third edition. A major feature to this exciting new edition includes a refined comprehension conversation with more rigorous assessment criteria.

With the clear guidelines and rubrics, we are confident that teachers will achieve consistency. The new guidelines and rubric will enable teachers to sharpen their observation of students' reading behaviors and strengthen the connection from assessment to instruction.

Since the third edition has a new scoring guide, you may see a difference in your child's reading level that differs from the last administration of the F&P from last spring.

Dear Members of the School Community,

Happy November! What a delightful month this is! It is the official start of the holidays and brings all of us thoughts of remembered family celebrations and traditions that we now share with our children. As you know full-well, November rushes by with astonishing speed.

The end of our first trimester is quickly approaching. With that comes a better understanding of our students, their skills and challenges and the development of plans to support them. Home-School communication is an extremely important part of a child's learning experience. Research shows that children are successful learners when there is a strong home-school partnership. The ARSU staff is committed to excellence in education in an environment where all children will maximize their greatest potential. We value your children and we value their learning! We invite you to join us in making this year of growth, learning and success for your child.

We want what is best for your child and we look forward to continuing to working with you in being partners in education. We appreciate sharing the same high expectations as you that your child will be encouraged, supported, and challenged to develop to his/her greatest potential academically, socially, physically, and emotionally. To achieve this goal teachers regularly communicate with you on the progress your child is making at Parent-Teacher Conferences; in newsletters, phone calls and/or emails; and on the report cards.

Your support is greatly appreciated. Our schools would not be nearly as successful without your input, help, and dedication. Thanks for all you do.

In Partnership,
Sherri Nichols



What do the educational experts tell us about grading and reporting?

According to Thomas Guskey and Robert Marzano, "The primary goal of grading and reporting is communication. Grading and reporting are integral parts of the instructional process. When done well, they provide vital information to students, parents, and other interested persons that can be used to enhance both teaching and learning. Grading and reporting certify attainment of learning goals, identify where additional work is needed and provide a basis for improvement efforts."

Standards based grading and reporting set target goals for students to achieve. According to another educational expert, Rick Stiggins, "Students can hit any target that holds still for them."

Why are we transitioning to a Standards Based Grading system?

- To provide accurate information about student progress according to the state standards; to emphasize what is learned rather than what is taught.
- To provide information relative to the strengths and weaknesses of your child in relation to him/her, rather than compare to other students.
- To help teachers adjust their teaching to ascertain that all students are moving forward.
- To improve communication to parents about what specifically their child is or is not able to do.
- To monitor academic achievement versus behavioral expectations.

What is Standards Based Grading?

Standards based grading is a key component when reporting feedback about a student's level of learning.

In standards based grading, students' proficiency is measured on specifically defined learning targets. These learning targets provide students (and teachers) with an accurate and specific way of measuring learning goals and progressions. It also provides students with specific feedback about their proficiency in a specified area of their learning.

While habits of work such as being respectful to others, level of effort, social behavior, attendance, completing tasks on time and are seen as important characteristics of student success, these qualities are not reflected as part of the content grade of the class. As a result, in a standards based grading system, a student's grade represents proficiency, and it is not impacted by extra credit or other non-achievement measures.

Standards based grading practices will improve teaching and learning for all students, as teachers and districts clearly identify what every child should know and be able to do in each subject area and grade level. The Common Core State Standards set high expectations. Achieving these career- and college-ready standards requires continuous monitoring of progress and additional support targeted to those who need it which lends itself to multi-tiered systems of supports and personalized learning.

Like teachers, parents need accurate and meaningful information about student strengths, challenges and performance to better understand and support student learning. Standards based grading better communicates student progress towards learning targets. Clear, consistent communication leads to focused efforts to raise student achievement. Once a student demonstrates mastery, they begin to work on more challenging material at higher levels for knowledge and skill.

Reporting student progress is an essential part of the communication and partnership process between home and school. It is the educator's professional responsibility to provide parents and students with complete and useful information that thoughtfully reflects the fullness of the learning process. Parents and students should have information that accurately reflects a student's level of performance and progress in meeting academic standards. The report card provides a "snapshot" of student learning that reflects grade-level expectations/standards, student achievement of an individual progress toward independently meeting expectations, and where support is needed. Learning is the message we wish to communicate to both parents and students. Students should be evaluated on their individual progress toward achieving the standards and skills of their grade level.

Why Change Grading Practices?

"Perhaps the most counterproductive aspect of schooling as we know it is the conventional system of letter grades. The problem with grades is not the use of symbols, but the absence of any DEFENSIBLE plan for coming up with the symbol... most grades reflect what is easy to count and average into a final grade" (Grant Wiggins).

"Grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (Marzano, R.J., *Transforming Classroom Grading*, ASCD, Alexandria, VA, 2001). Transitioning to a standards-based grading system communicates more clearly what students have learned and to what degree they have learned the standards. Traditional letter grades may seem understandable, yet they provide little detail about what children can do or what they have learned. A letter grade requires teacher and parent interpretation, but does not always explicitly communicate the level of student learning that has occurred. A standards based grading system tells the parent what the student can do and to what degree, so students, families and teachers can work together to set meaningful goals for future learning.





"If you wanted to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be challenging the prevailing grading practices" (Doug Reeves, 2008, p.85). The most effective grading practices provide accurate and understandable descriptions of student learning; use timely and descriptive feedback to enhance teaching and learning; use informed professional judgement instead of a mathematical algorithm. "Grading is not essential to the instructional process" (Guskey, Thomas, On Your Mark, Solution Tree, Bloomington,IN, 2015).

Do the performance descriptors on the report card correlate with letter grades?

No, the following performance descriptors are used to indicate a student's progress in meeting academic learning standards.

4 - Exceeding the Standard

3 - Meeting the Standard

2 - Progressing Toward the Standard

1 - Not Meeting The Standard

SCORING:

On a standards-based report card, a mark of "3" is the expected goal for students, which indicates that the student is meeting the requirements of the academic standards for his/her grade level. Marks of "3" and "2" both indicate that a student is working within the expectations of his/her grade level. The difference is the level of independence and support a student needs to demonstrate mastery. The expectation is that most students will achieve a "3" by the end of the year for each grade-level standard. District curriculum leaders continue to identify the CCSS taught and the district expectations required for each marking period to inform instruction and assessment. Learners are scored on their progress made toward mastery of those expectations set forth for each marking period.

4 – A mark of "4" indicates that the student's progress exceeds standards because s/he has demonstrated mastery in terms of knowledge, and s/he applies that knowledge in ways that go beyond expectations. Instruction needs to be differentiated for this student because the student has demonstrated mastery of the grade level expectation at this time. Typically, very few students would be at this level of performance. In terms of behavior, students receiving a "4" demonstrate academic and social maturity beyond their years and those of their age/grade appropriate peers.

3 – A mark of "3" indicates that the student's progress towards end of the year standards meets the district's expectations at this time. For example, a student who scores a 30% on the unit math pretest and receives a high score, even a 100%, on the posttest has responded well to instruction and receives a "3". This student has met the expectation independently and requires little to no adult support to demonstrate proficiency after instruction has been delivered. In terms of behavior, the student who consistently (more times than not) demonstrates age/grade appropriate social and academic behaviors meets the expected standard and should receive a "3".

2 - A mark of "2" indicates that the student's progression of skills and information is in the expected range, but s/he still requires support and assistance to meet the requirements of the academic standard for his/her grade level at this time.

Scoring Example

Learning Target: To ride a bike by yourself.

4 - Exceeding the Standard - Wow! You not only ride a bike on your own, but you can pop a wheelie, jump ramps, and perform other bike stunts.

3 - Meeting the Standard - Congratulations! You are successfully riding a bike by yourself.

2 - Progressing Toward the Standard You are pedaling well and staying upright as long as someone is holding on and giving you a little push.

1 - Not Meeting The Standard You are riding a bike, but using training wheels

1 – A mark of “1” indicates that the student is not meeting the requirements of the grade level standard at this time. His/her instructional level is characterized as requiring maximum teacher support and differentiation/accommodations or even modifications. In terms of behavior, the student who often (more times than not) demonstrates social and academic behaviors below what is expected for their age/grade receives a “1”. These behaviors are interfering with their learning and possibly the learning of others. It is expected that teachers have had dialogue with parents prior to the distribution of the report card for any student receiving a “1” for any standard.

N/A – A mark of “N/A” (or is shaded in) indicates that the standard has not been adequately introduced, covered, or assessed during the marking period. All standards on a grade-level report card will be addressed by the end of the school year.

What examples of data do teachers use to assign grades?

With a standards-based approach, teachers evaluate student learning in a variety of ways using classroom observations and classwork, along with formative and summative assessments. The combination of these pieces of evidence, when reviewed with parents, provides a more detailed picture of student progress towards grade level expectations.

Standards-based reporting and Special Education?

Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) must be provided with the same opportunity to receive grades in relation to expectations for grade level standards; this is a civil right. Since special education students are a heterogeneous group with various disabilities which impact learning, some may not achieve certain grade-level standards without special services and supports. For students with accommodations, the content of the standard remains the same, but the method for learning and demonstrating mastery of a standard may be adjusted. Modifications, on the other hand, can mean changing the standard itself, identifying standards that are fundamentally related but also developmentally appropriate. The IEP Team makes decisions regarding what content areas, if any, require modifications of the grade level standards. For all students with an IEP, a supplemental progress report is provided that identifies how students are performing on appropriately challenging learning tasks as outlined in the goals and objectives of their IEP.

Is it possible for students to “drop” from one marking period to another?

It is important to note that the student does not necessarily drop a grade. The score is an indication of performance with expectations of difficulty that increases throughout the school year. In other words, the concepts increase in difficulty as the year progresses. Therefore, a student who demonstrates a score of “3” in the first trimester could earn a “2” in the second trimester when the rigor of the standard has been increased. This shift from a “3” to a “2” indicates the student understands the major elements of the concept but may need more development of the details or application and more teacher support.

How do I help my child “get a 4?”

Remember, a mark of “3” indicates that a student is meeting grade-level expectations with independence and excellence. With high and challenging expectations, a “3” is exactly where a competent student should be. “Getting a 4” is not about what more a student does. It is what a student knows, and at what level s/he applies what s/he knows to new and higher-level situations that exceeds what is explicitly taught in class.



Habits of Work (HOW) that Support Learning

To accurately communicate to students and families specific information about achievement, grades must be a pure measure of student learning and achievement of the standards. Habits of Work (HOW) that Support Learning are indicators which describe the student's efforts, actions, behaviors, social skills, and work habits in the school setting and are reported on in a separate section of the report card. Although work habits and social development criteria are reflected separately on the report card than academic achievement, they are still a very important part of communicating to parents about their child's progress. By including effort and habits as a separate reporting category, teachers can more honestly communicate about such matters as behavior, participation, and completing assignments without distorting a student's actual academic achievement.

Benefits of Standards-Based Grading for...

Students

- Students are partners in their own learning.
- Students monitor their own progress toward the achievement of learning targets.
- Learning targets are clearly defined.
- Students understand the expectations and purpose of each learning experience.
- All assessments are clearly aligned to the learning targets, which are directly aligned to Vermont Standards.
- Students are required to think critically and to solve real-world problems.
- Students are offered multiple opportunities and ways through which to demonstrate proficiency.
- Instruction meets the needs of all students.
- All students can achieve their highest potential.

Parents

- Parents can monitor their student's progress.
- Parents can see exactly what their children know and are able to do.
- Parents know in what areas their children need more support and where their students should be pushed to higher levels.
- Report card grades are less mysterious and have more meaning.
- Requirements for student progression versus retention are much more clear.

Teachers

- Education becomes more learner-focused, so the teacher and student work more closely together.
- Teachers in the same grade level have the same expectations and standards.
- Teachers work more closely together due to common goals and understandings.
- Collaboration encourages consistency between teachers more than ever.
- In the same way that expectations for students are clearer, expectations for teachers are clearer, as well.
- Teachers know exactly where students stand in their progress toward learning targets and what supports need to be provided.
- Assessment results help teachers determine when students need extra help and when they need more challenging work.
- Professional development is focused on teachers helping students achieve at higher levels.



Standards Based Grading Implementation

As Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union (ARSU) continues to improve teaching and learning for all students, we know that parents and families are our most valuable partners.

This is especially true as the district continues to implement new, more rigorous standards for what every child should know and be able to do in each subject area and grade level. The Common Core State Standards, to which ARSU's Action Plan are aligned, set high expectations. Achieving these career- and college-ready standards requires continuous monitoring of progress and additional support targeted to those who need it.

Like teachers, parents need accurate and meaningful information about student strengths, challenges and performance to better understand and support student learning.

To that end, ARSU has developed a report card that is directly connected to the Common Core State Standards. The Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union adopted a Standards Based Report Card for students in kindergarten, through fifth grades in 2014-2015. This new standards-based report card was piloted with all teachers and students in Benson Village School, Castleton Elementary School, and Orwell Village School during the 2014-2015 school year. Fair Haven Grade School implemented the K-5 standards based report card in the 2015-2016 school year.

This year we will begin a new phase of the transition by implementing a standards-based report card in grades six through eighth grade at Castleton Village School and Orwell Village School. Benson Village School and Fair Haven Grade School will just be implementing sixth grade during the 2016-2017 school year, with full implementation during the 2017-2018 school year.

Standards based grading better communicates student progress towards learning targets. We believe this clear, consistent communication leads to focused efforts to raise student achievement.

Reporting student progress is an essential part of the communication and partnership process between home and school. It is the district's professional responsibility to provide parents and students with complete and useful information that thoughtfully reflects the fullness of the learning process. Parents and students should have information that accurately reflects a student's level of performance and progress in meeting academic standards. The report card provides a "snapshot" of student learning that reflects grade-level expectations/standards, student achievement of an individual progress toward independently meeting expectations, and where support is needed. Learning is the message we wish to communicate to both parents and students. Students should be evaluated on their individual progress toward achieving the standards and skills of their grade level.

We transitioned into a standards-based grading system at the elementary level in order to communicate more clearly what students have learned and to what degree they have learned the standards. Traditional letter grades may seem understandable, yet they provide little detail about what children can do or what they have learned. A letter grade requires teacher and parent interpretation, but does not always explicitly communicate the level of student learning that has occurred. The new standards-based report cards, we feel, tells the parent what the student can do and to what degree, so students, families and teachers can work together to set meaningful goals for future learning.



Eureka Module Math Focus End of Trimester 1 and beginning Trimester 2

Kindergarten's second module will start with describing and sorting flat shapes, and then solid shapes. Finally, they will learn to sort and compare both flat and solid shapes.

First Grade module 2 serves as a bridge from problem solving within 10 to work within 100 as students begin to solve addition and subtraction problems involving teen numbers. In Module 1, students were encouraged to move beyond the Level 1 strategy of counting all to the more efficient counting on. Now, they go beyond Level 2 to learn Level 3 decomposition and composition strategies, informally called make ten or take from ten.

Second Grade module 2, students engage in activities designed to deepen their conceptual understanding of measurement and to relate addition and subtraction to length. We will be exploring the ruler, estimating and measuring lengths using various tools and units, and finally, relating addition and subtraction to length. Their work in Module 2 is exclusively with metric units in order to support place value concepts.

Third Grade module 2 ties place value learning to some realworld work with measurement using the metric system. Students will also work on telling time and solving problems relating to elapsed time.

Fourth Grade module 2, students use length, mass, and capacity in the metric system to convert between units using place value knowledge. We will explore the patterns in the place value system through metric unit conversions, and will use mixed unit conversions to prepare for fraction and decimal operations to come.

Fifth Grade module 2, students will be building up their knowledge of first multiplication and then division. Students will start with whole numbers and then move to decimals as they practice different ways to model these operations.

Sixth Grade module 2, students complete their understanding of the four operations as they study division of whole numbers, division by a fraction, division of decimals and operations on multi-digit decimals. This expanded understanding serves to complete their study of the four operations with positive rational numbers, preparing students for understanding, locating, and ordering negative rational numbers and working with algebraic expressions

Seventh grade mathematics is about (1) developing understanding of and applying proportional relationships; (2) developing understanding of operations with rational numbers and working with expressions and linear equations; (3) solving problems involving scale drawings and informal geometric constructions, and working with two- and three-dimensional shapes to solve problems involving area, surface area, and volume; and (4) drawing inferences about populations based on samples.

Eighth grade mathematics is about (1) formulating and reasoning about expressions and equations, with a special focus on linear equations and systems of linear equations; (2) grasping the concept of a function and using functions to describe quantitative relationships; (3) analyzing two- and three-dimensional space and figures using distance, angle, similarity, and congruence, and understanding and applying the Pythagorean Theorem.

Currently, we have 18 eighth grade students participating in a Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative (VTVLC) Algebra I course along with taking eighth grade mathematics. Students learn at their own pace. To measure learning, students complete self-checks, practice lessons, multiple choice questions, projects, discussion-based assessments, and discussions.

High School Algebra begins with relationships between quantities and reasoning with equations and their graphs. Students analyze and explain precisely the process of solving an equation. Through repeated reasoning, students develop fluency in writing, interpreting, and translating between various forms of linear equations and inequalities and make conjectures about the form that a linear equation might take in a solution to a problem.

Algebra II begins with polynomial, rational, and radical relationships. Students connect polynomial arithmetic to computations with whole numbers and integers. Students learn that the arithmetic of rational expressions is governed by the same rules as the arithmetic of rational numbers.

Geometry begins with congruence, proof, and constructions through the study of transformations.



ACT 46: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR UNIFICATION

THE ADDISON RUTLAND ACT 46 COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<i>Amy Munger</i>	<i>Benson</i>
<i>Amy Hulst</i>	<i>Benson</i>
<i>Toni Lobdell</i>	<i>Castleton</i>
<i>Pete DeCarolis</i>	<i>Castleton</i>
<i>Robin Schoenfeld-Fox</i>	<i>Castleton</i>
<i>Tina Stevens</i>	<i>Castleton</i>
<i>Michael Bache</i>	<i>Fair Haven</i>
<i>David Carrabino</i>	<i>Fair Haven</i>
<i>Julie Adams</i>	<i>Fair Haven</i>
<i>Roy Eckler</i>	<i>Fair Haven</i>
<i>Thomas Spangenberg</i>	<i>Hubbardton</i>
<i>Glen Cousineau - Chair</i>	<i>Orwell</i>
<i>David Carpenter</i>	<i>Orwell</i>
<i>Richard Wilson</i>	<i>West Haven</i>

ACT 46 COMMUNITY FORUM PRESENTATIONS SCHEDULE

FOR INFORMATION PLEASE ATTEND THE FORUM IN
YOUR COMMUNITY OR ANY OF THE OTHER FORUMS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016 5:30 P.M.	WEST HAVEN TOWN HALL
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016 7:30 P.M.	HUBBARDTON TOWN HALL
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016 5:30 P.M.	BENSON TOWN HALL
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016 7:30 P.M.	ORWELL TOWN HALL
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2016 6:30 P.M.	FAIR HAVEN GRADE SCHOOL
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2016 6:30 P.M.	CASTLETON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The intent of ACT 46 is to move the State toward sustainable models of education governance.

Please view the Articles of Agreement and other information on the ACT 46 section of the ARSU website.

www.arsu.org/act46

ACT 46 GOALS

- Provide substantial equity in the quality and variety of educational opportunities.
- Lead students to meet or exceed the Educational Quality Standards.
- Maximize operational efficiencies through greater flexibility to manage, share, and transfer resources, with a goal of increasing district-level student-to-staff ratios.
- Promote transparency and accountability.
- Delivered at a cost that parents, voters, & taxpayers value.