

## Frequently Asked Questions About the CVCS Mastery Based Report Card

### Q. Why are we changing our report card?

**Answer:** A mastery-based report card gives more information than traditional letter grades, and reports how well the student is progressing towards achieving the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELO's) expected for his/her grade level. It also allows us to see a break out of the learning in each ELO, as well as the skills that support learning.

This allows us to identify student's strengths and weaknesses as we strive to help each child reach his/her fullest potential.

### Q. Will not giving grades impact student motivation?

**Answer:** No, research has shown that letter grades do not motivate students to learn, in fact:

1. Grades tend to reduce students' interest in the learning itself. One of the most well researched findings in the field of motivational psychology is that the more people are rewarded for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward (Kohn, 1993). Thus, it shouldn't be surprising that when students are told they'll need to know something for a test – or, more generally, that something they're about to do will count for a grade – they are likely to come to view that task (or book or idea) as a chore.

2. Grades tend to reduce students' preference for challenging tasks. Students of all ages who have been led to concentrate on getting a good grade are likely to pick the easiest possible assignment if given a choice (Harter, 1978; Harter and Guzman, 1986; Kage, 1991; Milton et al., 1986). The more pressure to get an A, the less inclination to truly challenge oneself. Thus, students who cut corners may not be lazy as much as rational; they are adapting to an environment where good grades, not intellectual exploration, are what count.

Intrinsic motivation is the most powerful kind of motivation—when a student is involved in the learning process by knowing their strengths and where they need to improve, the student can work with teachers and parents to set meaningful goals of excellence, strive to achieve the goals, and experience success.

### Q. My child is academically strong. How will standards-based teaching, learning and grading challenge my child?

**Answer:** Through mastery-based instructional methods of pre-assessment, teachers will know if students have already mastered concepts prior to a lesson or unit. This gives teachers an early opportunity to provide meaningful and challenging work for these students. In the classroom, teachers have always been, and will continue to be, required to challenge the students who are achieving at or above grade level. This is how we answer and address our “question 5” regarding: what do we do if they already know it? This will be no different with the new reporting tool. In fact, more than ever, they will be able to see who really has mastered the learning outcomes and who needs additional instruction or intervention.

## **Q. What happens if a skill is only assessed in one trimester?**

**Answer:** This will happen, especially in math. On the first report card, you will see fewer ELO's in math than in reading or writing. The first trimester will only list the ELO's that were assessed to that point on the report card and then each trimester will add to the list. If an ELO is on the list from a previous trimester, but was not assessed that trimester, the performance key indicator spot will be left blank.

If a student received below a 3 (proficient) in an ELO category, teachers will continue to allow additional time and practice through targeted small group and instruction and will update in future trimesters once they have shown grade level mastery. In other words, if your child has a "1" in an ELO on the first trimester and then second trimester through small group instruction has showing improvement towards the goal, you will see a "2" on the second trimester report card and if by the end of the year he/she has demonstrated mastery towards the ELO it will show a "3" on the final report card.

It's important to remember that the report card is measuring growth, not a fixed grade! In other words, our goal is to master the grade level ELO's by the end of that school year. Each trimester, each end of the year goal is broken into benchmarks and students are assessed if they have met the growth to be on target for the end of the year. Sometimes a student just needs more time and then will jump past two benchmarks and reach the year end goal in the last trimester.

## **Q. Is the secondary campus using this reporting system? What will the transition from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade look like?**

**Answer:** The secondary campus is continuing with traditional letter grades in report cards, however, their grading practice aligns with the elementary in the following ways:

- Learning and the skills that support learning are assessed differently. Essential Learning Outcomes are identified and assessed for each content area. Additionally, habits that support outcomes are established and assessed separately. They are currently working on reporting the habits that support learning in a separate area on the report card.
- The majority of a student's grade (no less than 80%) will reflect summative learning (mastery towards an ELO after instruction, feedback and practice has taken place) with no more than 20% of the grade being from formative assessment or practice such as homework.

The elementary report card will actually aide the transition from sixth to seventh grade by providing more detailed information on student's specific strengths and weaknesses ensuring accurate placement for students to set them for success.

### **Q. Isn't a "3" just another way of saying the student earned a "B"?**

**Answer:** One of the biggest differences between a traditional letter-grade report card and a mastery based report card is assessing what students have "learned" not "earned" based on very clear and specific expectations defined by CVCS Essential Learning Outcomes. A "B" is an average of the points earned on tests, quizzes, daily assignments, and so on but does not tell us what the student has really learned and achieved in terms of learning outcomes for a specific grade level.

### **Q. Will this impact the Presidential Awards in 6<sup>th</sup> grade:**

**Answer:** No. There are many elementary schools that use standards or mastery based learning. We are able use mastery based grades to determine presidential awards eligibility.

**Answer:** This requires a shift in how we look at and measure student progress and achievement. Instead of asking, "What do students need to do in order to **earn** a B?" we need to ask, "What do students need to **learn** in order to achieve the learning outcomes for their grade level?" This also requires a change in how we assess or measure student progress and achievement of the learning outcomes. Instead of asking how much do tests and quizzes count towards a student's final grade average, teachers are rethinking the role and purpose of assessments by asking: "What assessment evidence will I use to determine student growth towards mastery of the learning outcome?"

### **Q. Isn't an "E" just like an "A" and an "S" like a "C"?**

**Answer:** No. You **cannot** compare a traditional grading system to mastery based grading. It is like comparing "apples to oranges". Mastery based grading identifies essential learning outcomes for each grade level and indicates whether or not a student is meeting those outcomes at a given point in the school year. A mark of (S) is defined as meeting grade level outcomes and indicates that a student has demonstrated mastery of the skills that were expected to be learned by that point of the school year. A mark of (E) is defined as consistently working on learning outcomes that are above grade level expectation.

### **Q. How do I help my child "get a 4?"**

**Answer:** 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 he/she applies what he/she knows to new and higher-level situations that exceeds what is explicitly taught in class.

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

**Answer:** 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.